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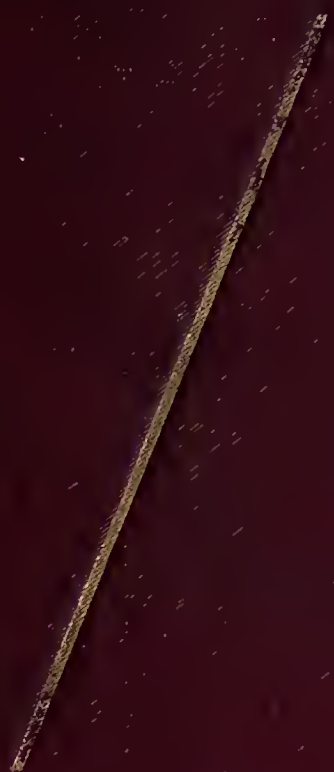

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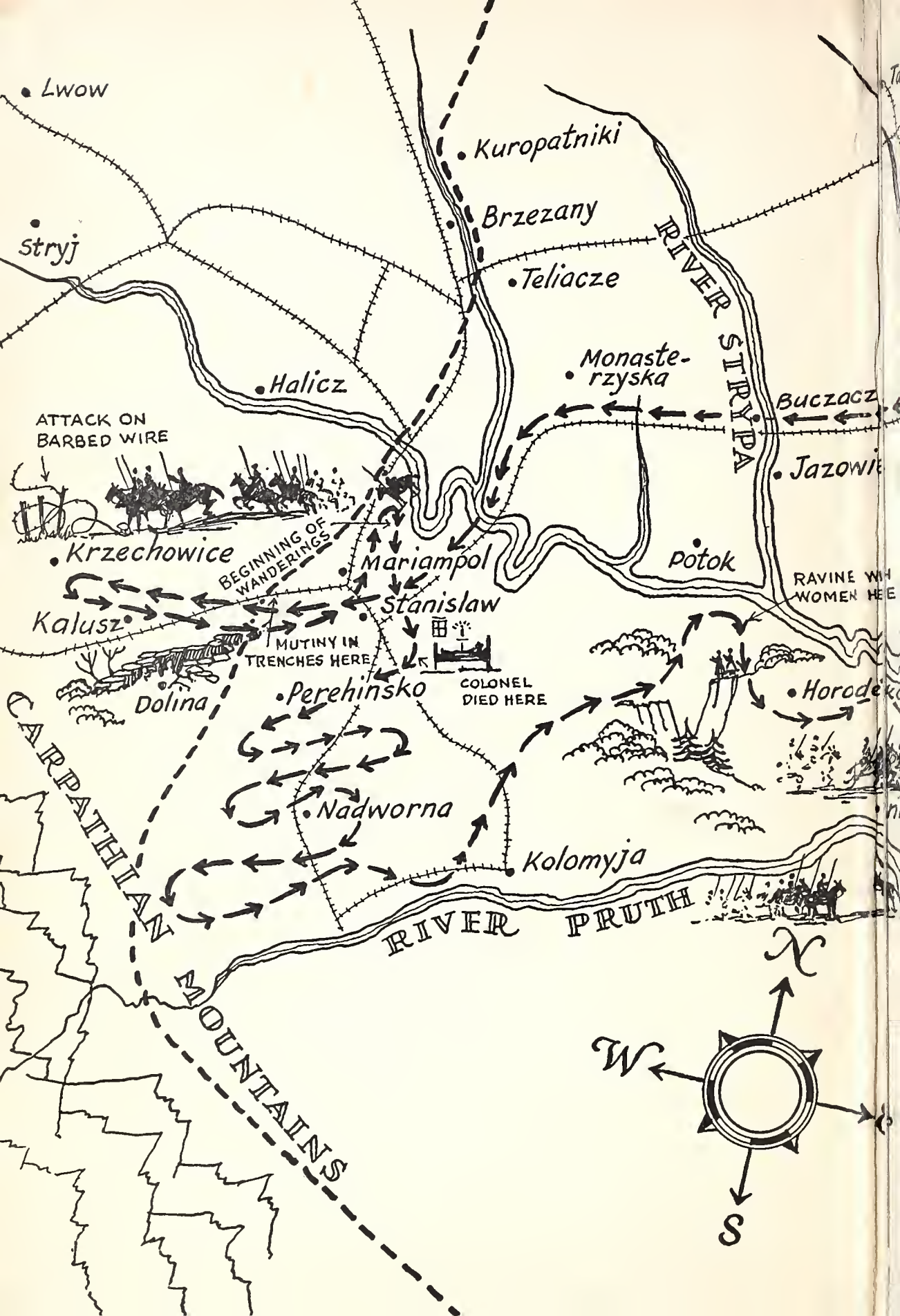
HELEN WOODWARD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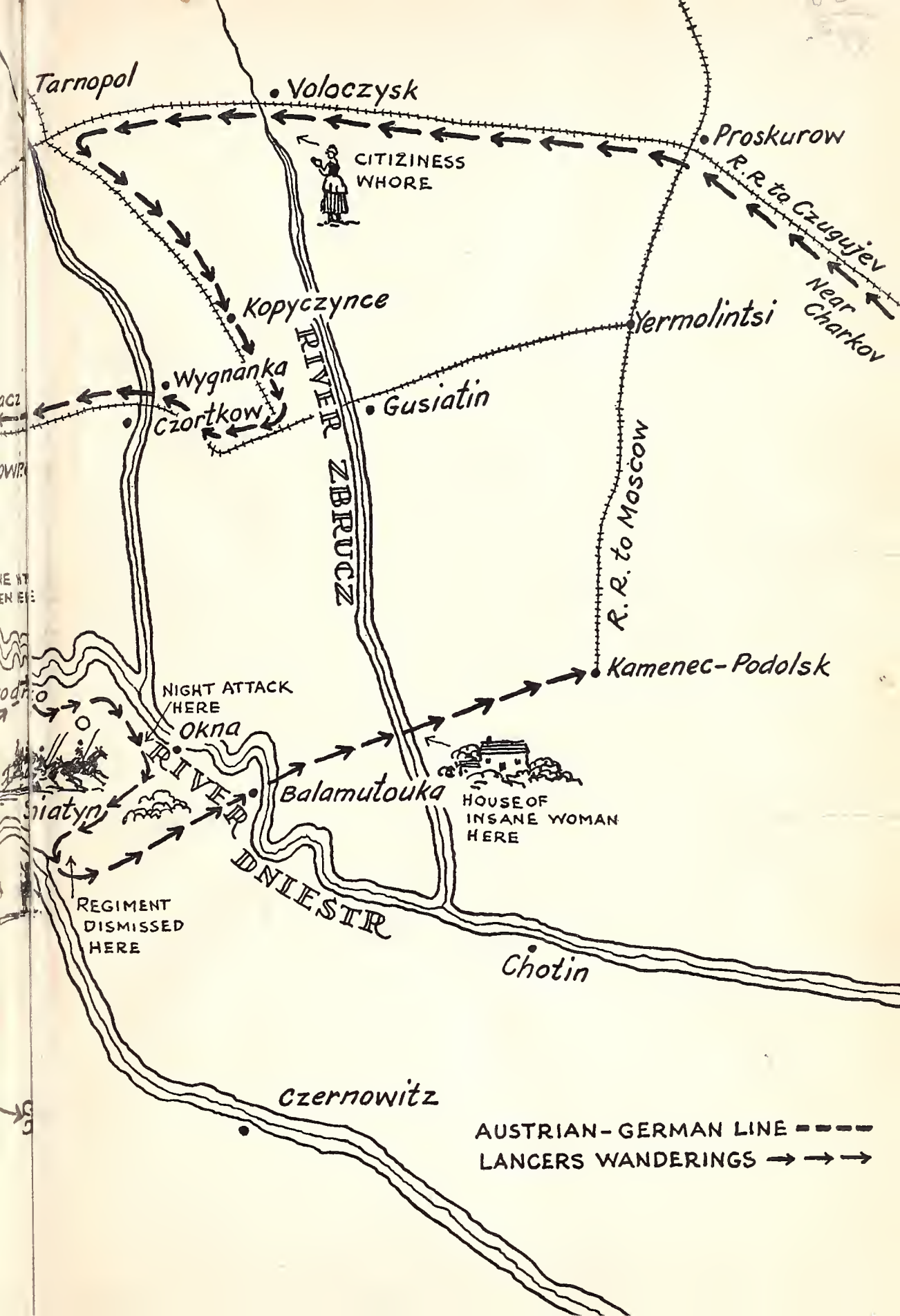
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VOLUME

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WAY OF THE LANCER

WAY OF THE LANCER

By

RICHARD BOLESLAVSKI

In collaboration with

HELEN WOODWARD

Indianapolis

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Publishers

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BY RICHARD BOLESLAVSKI
AND HELEN WOODWARD

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TO MY WIFE, NORMA,

A LANCER AT HEART,

R. B.

244761

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WAY OF THE LANCER

Way of the Lancer

I

MAN AND WIFE

THE German Colonel was to have a birthday. Our men knew all about it. The grape-vine telegraph brought the news, but I never found out how the grape-vine worked, nor did any other officer. There were two hundred yards of deadly ground between us and the Germans. If you wanted to find out how deadly that ground was you could raise a soldier's cap above the trench on the end of a rifle barrel, and hear the swish of bullets playing around it. Nevertheless, gossip and news, and all the little humanities of life managed to filter through. We knew almost as much about the Germans, and they about us, as two neighboring families in a small provincial town know about each other.

The Colonel's birthday was to come on Thursday. Would we be good enough not to disturb them on that day? They were to have wine and cakes, and one does not like to be shot at while feasting. In return for our politeness they would let us alone on some other day.

One day I saw a group of lancers bending over something. They were giggling and elbowing one another. As soon as they saw me they fell into confusion. One of the lancers put some small object behind his back.

"What is it, boys?"

They did not answer.

"Hand it over."

The man reluctantly showed a small kite. I should have been in trouble if a higher officer had seen the kite go up.

When I reached for it the lancer said: "Sir Lieutenant, we'll tear it up and throw it away."

"Come, come on," I commanded, "be sensible."

Smiling, and like a child caught in mischief, he gave me the kite.

It was a clumsy affair made of newspaper, with a home-made envelope attached. Inside was a soiled piece of paper, on which the picture of a frivolous young lady was crudely drawn. She was placed in a coarse and insolent attitude toward a rugged German Sergeant. Below was written, "Clara gave you the air. Ha! Ha! Ha!" In some secret way they had learned of the Sergeant's disastrous experience with Clara.

"You shouldn't do this," I said. "Sending messages to the enemy."

"Oh, they play jokes on us," said the men in chorus. "When it's a fight, we fight 'em, but we're not fighting now. We are doing this for fun."

In silence I took the kite away, knowing that anyhow another one would be made and sent across the lines. If I hadn't been an officer I should have sent it myself.

Sometimes I felt that if the officers on both sides should take a holiday the Russians and the Germans would run together like two groups of school children and play games. Play like children until somebody came back and shouted, "Stop it, stop it, don't you know you are in a state of war?"

I am a Pole, and I had joined the Russian army as a volunteer. The Grand Duke Nicholas had put out a manifesto promising freedom to Poland if the Allies won. Polish patriotism told me to go and fight. The Central Powers had done the same thing. They too had promised freedom to Poland, and many Poles were in their ranks. Poles fought against Poles, yet all of them were moved by the same patriotism and the same ideals.

There were two hundred of us in our regiment,—the Polish Lancers—a tiny segment of strangers in the vast body of the Russian army, separated even from the main body of Polish infantry legion. During the war, and later during the Revolution, we wandered in and out of the confusion, always a little detached from all of it. Though we fought and were killed, we were in spirit really onlookers.

We were closer to the Poles in the German army than we were to the Russians in our own.

And we felt toward the Russians a greater enmity than we did for example toward the Austrians; to the Russians we were never brothers. They looked on us as a conquered people. They did not so much dislike us as disregard us.

But I liked the men in the Russian army, and they liked me. Once or twice they had saved me from unpleasant things, and I was grateful. As an officer I had better conditions to live under. If, for instance, there were a puddle of water, a piece of mud and a wet stone for three people to lie on, the officer got the wet stone, the sergeant got the mud and the soldier lay down in the water.

In the autumn of 1916 our regiment of lancers was about half-way between the Black Sea and the Baltic. Behind our swarming lines spread wide, deep-hearted Russia. In Russia's silent soul somber and gripping thoughts were stirring. In time to come these thoughts were destined to rise and walk through the land like giants with heavy feet and fingers of steel. They would trample down the ancient order and set up in its place new gods and new leaders.

But that time was still in the future. On our front things were pretty much at a standstill. The duty of officers and men, except for the sad affair of being wounded and the still sadder affair of dying, was an easy routine. There was time to think and talk. It was as though everybody sat down and thought over what had come to pass during these

last two years. And as though each one asked, "Where shall I be two years from now?"

It was funny enough knowing that the German Sergeant had had an unfortunate amatory experience. For weeks the lancers talked about it, and laughed heartily, but war laughter, like hysteria, slips easily into shrieks, and after that into dead silence—into endless silent thoughts and endless questions.

About six o'clock one morning our regiment was ordered to stand by. We were to occupy a certain village half an hour away on horseback.

The Germans had taken the village without trouble and held it for two days. It seemed one of those little affairs which happened now and then to remind us that we were at war. The village was meaningless and of no importance to the trench strategy.

At seven o'clock we took the village back. The Germans had retreated. Everything was in order. There were about fifty people there—the aged and the children. We were ready to spend a pleasant evening and to have a good night's sleep.

Later, silent and secret, Russian anti-aircraft artillery arrived in the village. Three guns took hidden positions, covered with canvas which was camouflaged by being painted green, black and yellow to resemble the soil. But the instant they were established in the woods, a heavy fire came from far beyond the German lines. In half an hour the anti-aircraft battery was a ruin.

It was strange. We had come so swiftly. At six we had got our orders. At seven we took the village. One hour. The aircraft guns had come so secretly and had immediately been destroyed. We were suspicious.

Our next job was to find out what was wrong with that village, and we began right then, in the darkness. We

searched not only the village itself, but for miles around for hidden wires or connections.

At the bottom of a creek we found an insulated wire. We followed it foot by foot and it led us straight into a barn; under the floor of the barn the wire slipped up a wall and into the carcass of a freshly slaughtered calf that was hanging from a beam. Inside the calf was a telephone instrument. The queerest place in the world for a telephone, but there it was.

We saw the whole scheme clearly. The Germans had taken the village and then left it after only two days in order to establish this telephone line.

The barn belonged to a peasant couple; she was a German, he a Pole. They were in their forties, he a little the elder. They were arrested in their beds. There was a court martial at once.

I was on duty outside the dilapidated little house where the trial was held. It was a dirty and weather-beaten place; its broken windows were covered by boards and horse blankets. I lifted one of the blankets and looked in. Three officers sat at a table on which there were two lighted candles.

Throughout the scene which followed the officers sat with their elbows on the table and their heads on their hands. They seemed heavily weary, like a laborer who has toiled all night, and in the morning, too tired to go home, rests his elbow on the counter of some shabby lunch-room while he eats a dull breakfast.

They questioned the couple. It was unnecessary, because the officers, and everybody else, knew what must happen.

"How old are you?" "Where were you born?" "What nationality?" And so until the last tragic question. "Guilty or not guilty?"

The man made no answer. He hung his head as in

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shame. But before the presiding officer had a chance to put that last short question to the woman she burst into furious speech. She was too excited to stick to one language. Polish, Russian and German poured from her in a torrent of fury and hate. She had been a Silesian girl and had married the Pole, she said. Probably she had loved him, but she had not loved the country to which he had brought her. Her German family had suffered from the war: father, brothers, all had been killed. She talked for ten minutes, cursing the officers before her, cursing the whole army, the Russian Emperor, the world.

The ritual of court martial requires a straight answer, guilty or not guilty. Not that it makes any difference which you say. Now and again when she paused in her high-pitched, sharp incoherence to take a breath, the calm voice of the Major broke in with his question,

"Guilty or not guilty?"

No answer; only more raving.

"Guilty or not guilty?" A monotonous question, uttered with the mechanical insistence of a phonograph.

The woman drew a long breath, but she used it in mere babbling, in words that came so fast that they ran into a stream of animal-like sounds.

"Guilty or not guilty?"

Peasant fashion, her husband nudged her with his elbow, to say whether she was guilty or not. At last she seemed to understand, paused, then shouted:

"Yes, yes, I am guilty; but no more guilty than you are. You who killed all mine. I wanted to do it, and I would do it again."

By midnight the candles had guttered down into fantastic forms of melted tallow. The room was full of dark shadows and greasy smoke. The Major half turned his head and looked into the eyes of the officer on his right, then shifted

his eyes toward the officer on his left. Two eyelids dropped. He wrote on a protocol.

"Guilty."

The officers rose.

As the guards were taking them away, the woman kept on talking. Her husband tried to calm her with soothing words. If she heard him she paid no attention. The woman's voice melted into darkness, but after the couple had passed out of sight I still heard her.

Next time I saw them it was six o'clock in the morning. Dawn was barely breaking and a fine mist was falling. The platoon marched from the village across a field, the woman and the man in the middle. It was hard walking. The men's heavy boots sank into the soft ground.

We stopped at a small ravine under tender birches, which looked so tall, so sadly flexible and young in that light morning breeze, like the shimmering shadow of trees reflected in water. No one spoke a word. Silence loomed larger. During the ceremony of execution which followed silence became more positive and fuller of meaning. Commands were given in a low tone, almost in a whisper. The Adjutant read the decision of the court. He either had a cold or he was shivering. I stood ten yards away. I could not hear a word. Probably nobody did.

The man seemed terribly ashamed. He stood with his head down, and his head was bare. He looked like the portraits of Nietzsche. He had a sharp nose, aquiline, with a bushy mustache. His hands were red—the rough hands of a plowman—and he kept clasping and unclasping them. I thought I saw tears on his face, but perhaps they were drops of rain. He did not look as though he were crying.

The branches of the trees were dripping with fog and mist.

The woman was all through with life. Certain people

die when they want to die although their bodies continue to function and legally they are considered alive. After the tirade which she had kept up far into the night, she had died inside completely. We who had seen so many corpses knew that lifeless expression of open eyes which look steadily into one point. But if you put yourself at that point you realize that though looking at you they are not seeing you. She was looking and not seeing anything. Between her lips was a bit of straw which she kept chewing. Over her head she wore a big shawl. She held it firmly with her hands at her bosom. The air was chilly.

The sentence read, the Sergeant came up to her and said something in a low voice which I could not hear, but I knew he said, "If you want to pray you can have five minutes." There was no priest. The Sergeant was preoccupied with the idea that there was no priest. He seemed disturbed that this detail was irregular. No priest. I could see that this thought lay heavy within him. Do not the army regulations say: "If the condemned expresses a desire to have the last rites performed by a priest of his or her religion, the request should be granted"? But there was no priest. How could we go on? The Sergeant was troubled.

The woman was as silent as a statue. Her stream of words had dried up. She was through with living.

There was an awkward pause. We did not know whether they wanted to pray. We did not want to disturb them, yet we could not move away. Some of the soldiers started to stamp their feet, either to get warm or from nervous impatience.

The Sergeant came and stood by me awkwardly for a long voiceless minute. At last he said foolishly, "Are your quarters all right, sir?"

"Yes," I said, "comfortable enough."

The Adjutant looked at his wrist-watch about ten times.

I don't know whether he waited the whole five minutes. I suspect only three.

The two people were not praying. They were doing nothing, standing and waiting.

The Adjutant nodded to me.

I nodded to the Sergeant.

The Sergeant exaggeratedly clicked his heels and stiffened in salute. This was peculiar, because he was a lazy fellow who thought that any officer was lucky to get him as a sergeant. Stiffly he turned about face, marched eight or ten yards from the Lieutenant to the couple, standing quiet and alone, and said something.

The man nodded a couple of times and, very shy and shrinking, gave his hand to his wife. She turned her head with a slow indolent motion. The dawn had widened into day, and I could see her face distinctly: her bushy eyebrows first, and then the line of her narrow flat mouth. Wrinkles centered all around that tight mouth like the lines of a halo. Her face was the exact color of the dirty snow which lay here and there under foot.

There was no pain in her face, no fear. Only the calm movement of lips still chewing the straw. She moved her head slowly, slowly as though it were some one's else head and she were turning it on a heavy pivot, and fixed her gaze on her husband. She did not give him her hand. He held his outstretched toward her for a few seconds. His back was to me and I could see how his shoulders began to bend and get round, how they began to shake, and then, how more and more strongly they shook. Like a shamed boy, he humped his head into her shoulder and sobbed slowly, not loud, but uh-uh-uh, like the noise of a man who is chopping down a big tree and hitting the ax on the wood.

Every movement, every word, seemed as though produced by a slow-motion movie camera.

The deep mournful weeping of the man did not change the woman's expression. She stood erect and quiet, his head resting awkwardly on her shoulder. She kept her head turned in his direction. She did not look down at him, but straight over his head, through me, and into nothing. As she had turned her head around toward him, she now turned it away.

With dead calm, she started toward a little step-ladder clumsily made of four broken boards. It stood under the branch of a tree.

As she walked away from his head that was resting on her shoulder, the man lost his balance a little and moved after her a step or two. He began to clean his nose, still sobbing.

A soldier from a Russian infantry regiment had volunteered to be the hangman in return for a few days of extra leave. A middle-aged man, a common farmer, he had a wife and five children, this soldier, and you would never have expected cruelty from him. He had probably hanged a couple of horse-thieves in his life, and so knew how to do the job. No one had asked him to.

He went up the improvised step-ladder, six feet high, and waited for the woman to follow. She tried to climb, holding on by one hand which she brought out from under her shawl. She couldn't manage it. She tried the other hand. It didn't work.

In a soft voice the soldier hangman at the top of the ladder gave her friendly advice. "Take your shawl off, sister." The woman did. She had on a black petticoat and nothing else but a shirt. She and her husband had been caught at eight o'clock at night. They had already been in bed, and had had no chance to dress. Through her shirt of rough canvas we saw her bent, big-boned shoulders. A woman who had worked hard all her life, the stark heavy work of a woman on a peasant farm. Her arms, bare

below the elbow, were dark and worn, and her hands had square peasant palms and rheumatic fingers. She came up to the level on which the soldier stood, holding her shirt closed in front with her two hands.

Before I could realize what was happening the soldier made a quick movement around her head, then jumped with a loud thud on to the ground. In the next moment with a strong kick he knocked the ladder out from under her legs. Like a bird lifting its wings she flew in an almost graceful gesture, her arms up in the air, and started to move them toward her throat. Half-way they fell down. She began to whirl around on the rope, three times to the right, two and a half left, two right, one and a half left. All that time convulsions were shooting through her body as though she were laughing. Her head was bent down and I could not see her eyes. Her mouth was suddenly wide open. All this swift and without a pause.

I could not take my eyes from the hanging figure which turned this way and that in the air. I had no emotions, for the emotions, like the hands, become calloused in time. In this second year of war, I knew there was no help. One could do nothing. The whole procedure was sanctified by humanity, by man's law, by military law and, for all I knew, by God's law. If it were not I who was here it would be some one else. It was my hard luck to be here on this particular day.

Suddenly I saw three lancers passing me. Mechanically my eyes followed them. The husband was lying on the ground without movement; he had collapsed, perhaps fainted, perhaps he was dead.

The lancers lifted him as gently as they could, carried him to the same branch from which his wife was hanging. Two yards from her another noose hung waiting for him. The three lancers had to hold him while the infantry soldier

hangman put the noose around his neck. When they let go, his feet did not hold him up. He hung tied by the neck with his legs at a queer angle on the ladder. Quickly again the executioner jumped and kicked out the ladder. But I think the man was already dead.

Nobody said a word.

We started to march back slowly across the sodden field. There was no sound save that of marching feet. I had a feeling that the men who had stayed in the village looked at us as though they thought us unfortunate human beings because we had to walk through that mud before breakfast.

My chum, Lieutenant Chmiel, stuck his head through a window and shouted across the street. "Come on, hurry up, father, the sausages are ready."

And so they were.

After breakfast everything was normal. All had passed in half an hour. A few days afterward I had almost forgotten it. A year later that scene came to me again vividly, as in a lighted picture. I don't know why, but it stood in my memory, a vision so clear that it was clearer than reality.

In two days we had settled our offices and quarters, our stables and kitchens. We had a place where the officers came to play cards and repeat the same obscene stories that we all knew. Everybody was sick of those dreary yarns, but no one thought of inventing new ones. The old ones did just as well.

II

WHAT FOR?

"You must move out," said the Sergeant to an old woman in a striped petticoat. I say old because she looked old, but she could not have been, for three small children called her mother. She stared at the Sergeant and smiled uncertainly, as if she had heard a joke that she did not quite understand.

For two weeks after the execution all was quiet in front of us, to the left and to the right. Now this morning had come an order to burn the village and to retreat another sixty miles to the east. We were going from door to door to tell the fifty villagers that their homes would be destroyed that evening.

"It's true, mother," said the Sergeant emphatically. "You must get out, we're going to burn this house."

"Why do you have to burn this house?" she asked. "It's my house."

"It's not for me to say," the Sergeant interrupted. "It's orders."

Her hands twisted about nervously in the fold of her petticoat.

"Whose orders?" she asked.

There was a sort of plaintive, pitiable defiance in her voice. She was trying to demand her rights, to argue the case, to get the orders changed. That seemed to be her intention. But the orders could not be changed. They were part of a strategical move. This woman, her house, and her children were caught in the net of the higher strategy.

The Sergeant looked at me with an unspoken question in his eyes.

"Orders have come," I said, "that this village and every house in it must be burned down."

"This house?" she repeated in a quavering tone, as if the house were a part of her.

"Yes," I continued, "this house. You can take away anything you please. Better get out with your children and all the food you can carry, and go on."

She shook her head vaguely, and gazed at me as if she hoped to make me ashamed of myself. I was, but such feelings are futile. I was a soldier, a mechanism directed by minds whose ideas and motives were unknown to me.

Her children stood about her, their small hands clutching her skirt. They looked up in mute wonder at their mother's face, and then at me.

"Who gives that order," she kept repeating, "to burn this house? To burn. . ."

She had lived in that house all her life; it was the only home she knew.

I walked off without replying. I had already said all I could. As I turned away I noticed that she was beginning to prepare her dinner, as if nothing had happened. Perhaps she did not believe that the Sergeant or I were in earnest.

We had been friendly with these people. They had treated us as well as they could. Their stock of potatoes, which was all the food they possessed, had been buried to keep during the winter, but they had dug up the potatoes and shared them with us. We had given them salt and canned salmon and buckwheat.

Now we told them that they would have to collect what they could and move anywhere they wanted to, preferably to the east. They could not understand. They did not want to understand; they did not want to believe. Over and over

interminably they asked us the same questions, and we always replied with the same words.

Around seven o'clock we told them that in one hour we would set fire to the village. When at seven they saw the regiment saddling horses and moving quietly out, they began to suspect that we had meant what we said. I was left with a platoon to burn the village, but not to start before midnight. I said to the old women and the old men, and the young women with children:

"Your best chance is to go with the regiment. Follow them as long as you can."

Some went. But not all together. One by one they dribbled out, still not quite believing: in couples, in threes and fours, moving slowly away and disappearing under the trees in the evening shadows.

At half past eleven we went to the four points of the compass, at the ends of the village, and piled up last year's straw and everything else we could find that was burnable. We made a straight connection of inflammable material from house to house because the roofs were wet.

At midnight the Sergeant set a match to the straw. The eager fire swept into the black sky and extinguished the stars. The flames stood up straight and strong against the blue-black velvet of the night. As the house timbers began to crackle our horses snorted nervously and stamped on the ground.

We mounted and moved away as quickly as possible, without looking back. On the white bark of the birches the red light shone in front of us, pink and ghostlike.

Ten minutes' fast trotting brought us to a hilltop, into the midst of a group of people who were sitting on the ground, or standing about, facing the crimson flare. Almost all of them, especially the women and children, were sobbing.

They did not accuse us. There were no reproaches. A

vast evil thing had come into their lives, and nobody could tell them whence it had come, nor why it had come. Some of them stared at us mutely, while others walked by our horses, asking, "What for?" again and again.

"Why did you burn our village?" an old man demanded of me briskly, as if he were opening up a new subject of debate.

"It was our orders," I replied.

"What for?" he inquired instantly.

"Orders," I repeated.

"Yes, orders," he said slowly. "But what for . . ."

"I don't know," I answered, as I moved slowly on with the platoon. "We were ordered to do it."

He was silent a moment, walking along with my horse, then he began again.

"Why did you burn our village?"

I made no answer.

Millions of men and women asked the same question, "What for?" every day, and every hour of the day—and there was no answer.

There was a peasant soldier in a hospital where I had to stay for a little while.

This peasant was a beautiful statue of a man with the muscled poise and unconscious dignity that one sees in the work of the ancient Greeks. He was about forty years old, six feet tall, and of splendid proportions. His face was fresh, and his skin as fine as that of a child. Big blue eyes looked clearly from under bushy eyebrows and flaxen hair. His light blond beard was untouched by shears. Although he could not read, he was not stupid.

He had never been in a city before. His grandfather, his father and he himself had all grown wheat on their few acres. At the end of each season some one came with money and took the wheat. With the money they purchased all

they needed at the nearest village. Their lives had been simple and honest. They knew nothing of dynasties, of colonial ambitions, of the European balance of power. A curious and malign fate had drawn this open-hearted peasant into the deadly whirl of forces that he could not understand. He was like some stricken bird, wounded and in a cage, and wondering what it was all about.

For several days he had been traveling on a train. Because he was considered lightly wounded it had not even been a Red Cross train, yet his wound was extremely painful, and his eyes were dry and wide open with suffering. A shell had shattered all his fingers except one on each hand. His hands had been bandaged, and he thought his palms were wounded but that he had his fingers. It was hard for him to hold his hands at ease. He kept them folded as in prayer, or on his chest like a dead man. He had never seen the inside of a hospital.

He looked with dignity, in spite of the piercing pain, into the face of the chief doctor.

"I am a provider," he said. "I support a family."

The doctor didn't look at him. He was studying his papers.

In a monotone, the peasant again said, "I am a provider."

The doctor lifted his tired red eyes and held them for a short time on the peasant's face. In a quiet husky voice he addressed the nurse.

"Case 14653."

The nurse started to write up the entry papers.

"I am a provider," the peasant said again.

They made him lie down. They took off the bandages, showing eight chunks of swollen and congealed pieces of red flesh. They didn't look like fingers at all. The surgeon spoke in Latin, and in a very low tone.

"Amputation."

The nurses quickly busied themselves. The peasant was so strong and healthy that a slight anesthetic put him almost instantly to sleep. Like a giant in a fairy tale he lay calmly sleeping. He made no sound.

Fifteen minutes. One finger after the other went into the pail.

His hands were lying on a glass shelf on which the doctor was performing the operation. The chloroform nurse, absorbed in watching the doctor, and deceived by the quiet of her patient, did not realize that the anesthetic had worn off.

Before they bandaged his hands he opened his eyes. The first thing those eyes saw were two stumps on the glass shelf. An inhuman sob rose from him. He lifted his head, and the stumps of his hands began to tremble.

"What for?—What for?"

A nurse made him lie back. Another placed a small screen in front of him. He was weeping like a child.

"What for?"

Just those two words he would repeat, shifting his eyes from one face to another, and looking for an answer. But there was none. Neither to him nor to the people from the burned village, now on the hilltop, crying the same words:

"What for?"

We went on at a fast trot and in half an hour we reached the rest of the regiment and learned that our sector was retreating because the flanks had no ammunition.

That night the mysterious ways of communication between the soldiers would be busy. Along thousands of miles of front would go secret word from one to another, "Again there was no ammunition. To-day it's the Polish Lancers who have had to retreat."

III

BROTHERS

For five days we moved toward the east, riding day and night. The short rests were mostly for the horses.

We rode through day-long and night-long rains. The skies were flat and gray. Now and then chilly forlorn birds scudded overhead in the wintry winds, uttering weird cries. On the trees there were a few leaves, brown and ready to fall. When it rained the leaves came whirling down; leaves and rain. At night everything would freeze. In the morning the manes and tails of the horses would be steaming chunks of ice, and the blankets like sheets of crust.

Sometimes we would get our orders in such an important way that we would think, "Well, now something will start." And then we would come to some new place and wait maybe for a day. Everything would be kept in readiness; nerves would be strung with expectation.

And nothing would happen. The daily motorcycle or the panting horse would arrive. A crumpled yellow envelope. In a few moments we would have to march again, always going farther away from the front line. Russia was retreating. Brave men, without ammunition, were helpless. Something was terribly wrong.

Still there was almost no comment. No one questioned when things were not clear. Nobody worried and nobody cared. Everything was done in a hushed manner, with no excitement.

We were now resigned to an unknown fate. Like the rain which would go on for ever, it seemed to us that we too

would go on for ever. And like the rain, we seemed to have no particular reason for going on. The only thing plain was that there was no purpose in our existence.

The more we kept moving away from the front, the deeper the feeling of silence and depressing hush. The cannon now would thud from far away, and their heavy irregular breath would sound like the breath of some giant who is very, very tired and doesn't want to go any farther.

We seemed to be on an endless, aimless retreat, and were worse off than the men in the trenches. In the front lines, they were taken care of in one way or another. Somehow food was delivered to them, and if they found a civilian who had two blankets he had to give them up. But when you are retreating from the line of fire you are going for a rest. The worst is supposed to be over; so the food is not so good and you must consider yourself the guardian of the civilian population.

Yet nobody grumbled. The resignation of the people was a powerful force. It was almost as strong as a rebellion, except that rebellion moves and resignation is passive. The resignation was still, but with the stillness of high-tension wires charged with electricity. Sometimes the wires sputtered a little.

One morning we had started at about three o'clock and had been marching for many hours before we could see where we were going.

In the first gray light we saw that the road was beautiful, a big broad dirt road, straight as a taut string, a main thoroughfare. It had probably been laid out with a ruler on the map, like many other roads in Russia; therefore, it did not curve around the hills, it did not skirt along the rivers, it did not step carefully in the cities. It just ran amuck, like a crazy horse, straight, without paying any attention whatever to either side.

It wasn't easy to follow that road. Mud, oceans of mud. Artillery, infantry, trucks, cavalry, had plowed along here for two years, and temporary quick repairs had not helped much.

We moved along the side of the road in single file, one after another. Our horses picked their way, trying to find the dry spots. Sometimes with a heavy grunt they would fall knee-deep into a mud-hole. At that we were lucky. The horses took care of us.

After a while we came up with a crowd of prisoners, several hundred of them, clodhopping along in the same direction as ourselves. They marched slowly. It took them a long time to lift the left foot out of the mud, where it had sunk almost to the calf, to push it forward into fresh mud, and then to lift the right foot out of the mud and push it forward.

Some tried to walk along the hard edge of the road, but it was difficult for these tired people to jump from one firm spot to another, at the risk of sprained ankles. With heavy resignation, they would go back into the mud.

It didn't matter to them how slowly they walked, and it didn't matter where they were going. They went like men asleep on their feet.

We moved a little faster than they, and so for some time we were going along at the side of their column. They didn't seem to envy us for riding on horses. And we did not feel any particular sympathy toward them. We were too tired to feel the empty emotion of sympathy. We were in different circumstances, but we were all mixed up in one mess. Austrian prisoners, Polish Lancers, Russian soldiers, officers and men, all in a gray and benumbing purgatory.

Suddenly one of our lancers heard his name called. The voice came from the ranks of the prisoners. He did not

pay any attention at first, but directly he saw that a prisoner, in the middle of the road, was trying desperately to make his way diagonally toward him.

It sounds strange to say that a man tried desperately to walk from the middle of the road to the edge, but it was a hard job. It was as though a big herd of cows were swimming across a river and one cow from the middle of them wanted to go in an opposite direction, against both the current and the rest of the herd.

The prisoner, all the while struggling with his feet glued to the mud, kept crying the name "Peter" until finally the lancer turned and looked at the struggling man, trying to recognize him. But the lancer did not stop his horse. Behind him there were one hundred and fifty other men, and they were all following the narrow path on the edge. He could not stop unless he broke the ranks.

The prisoner kept on, and before long he was only a few feet away. They recognized each other.

They were brothers. Poles. One was in the Russian army, the other was in the Austrian army; and now the Austrians had been captured by the Russians and were prisoners of war. The brother in the Austrian army had not heard anything about his family, on the Russian side, for three years.

For the first time in three years they were seeing each other. One, riding, not knowing where. The other, marching, not knowing where.

The prisoner put his hand on the pommel of his brother's saddle, but they did not shake hands, nor touch each other. In that endless slow movement, plodding through the mud, they started to talk. The brother on the horse said in a quiet voice, "Our house was blown up by a shell."

The prisoner nodded slowly. "And mother?" he asked.

"Dead. Last spring, before the sowing." His voice

had a flat hollow tone, like that of a dying man who speaks.

The prisoner nodded again, and his face was sad.

"Father?"

"I don't know. Somewhere . . ."

A long pause. They looked and spoke slowly in rhythm with the slow movement of marching feet.

"Sister?" asked the young man.

"Yulka went to town." In the colloquialism of Polish peasants, this meant she had gone to the city for no good reason. The marching prisoner shook his head, but made no comment. He seemed to be reflecting on these disasters, but objectively, as if they had happened to some other family. After he had heard the news about his sister he was silent for a while, then he began to ask more questions. Little short questions about people they both knew—and little short answers. A conversation that ran almost entirely in monosyllables. Neither one appeared to be moved. It was as though they had met in a mystical unreal world of moving mud. That mud was relentlessly dragging them somewhere, and their personal disaster was only a small part of a larger and more reverberating catastrophe.

An Austrian officer among the prisoners saw what was going on, and probably did not consider it patriotic for a private of His Most Catholic Majesty, the Emperor of Austria, to mingle with the enemy. A good sport. One of those with an unconquerable fighting spirit. As he neared the brother walking beside the horse, this officer abused him in a long speech in typical military German, which sounded just like barking. If you have ever seen a pre-war German officer in a Berlin restaurant you know what I mean. He would sit down at a table and say to the cringing waiter, *"Kaffee, bitte schön,"* with a sharp ringing upward inflection on each word. Even when he said *"Auf wiedersehen"* it sounded like an insult.

The Austrian officer came up and barked at the prisoner, who was walking by the side of his brother's horse. The prisoner paid no attention; he did not even turn his head. He could not stop and turn around. But he could at least have looked at the officer.

No, he did not even look. He was asking about the crop of two years ago, about the calf which he had left when mobilization came, about a cousin.

This was too much for the officer. With an effort he rushed ahead, grabbed the man's shoulder, turned him around, and slapped him in the face. Five fingers, because the officer's palm was dirty and the soldier's face was wet, were ridiculously stamped on the prisoner's face. As in a slapstick moving picture—five fingers on the face.

In a flash, the lancer on the horse raised his hand. In it was the short heavy whip which we use on the horses. With a sharp crack he brought the whip down on the officer's head.

At that moment came the sound of a whistle from the front, which ordered us to stop and give the horses ten minutes' rest, to dismount, and to look over the saddles and the hoofs.

The officer fell to the ground and lay there looking wildly around. He was stunned by the blow. He didn't say a word. Probably he was waiting to be murdered by the lancer. The German papers had many times reported cases where prisoners were murdered by those savage riders. That's why there was a war. To civilize those barbarians.

The Sergeant approached to see what it was all about. But he couldn't speak German, and the officer couldn't speak either Polish or Russian, so the Sergeant asked in a loud voice whether any prisoner spoke Russian or Polish. None could, and nobody cared to explain what had happened.

Meantime the two who had begun it all, the lancer and

the Austrian prisoner, continued to talk as if nothing had occurred. At the same time the lancer was checking carefully the state of his horse's hoofs.

The Sergeant turned around and went back. Then the Austrian officer, realizing that he could do nothing, got up and tried to return to his column which was marching on.

He reached the side of the column and attempted to keep pace with one of the prisoners.

That prisoner was a big, husky, dark-looking man—he looked like a Hungarian. The officer approached him. Perhaps the blow over the head had been too strong. Perhaps he was wounded. He was very pale, and tried to lean on the Hungarian, but the Hungarian pushed him roughly away. There were no officers now.

It wasn't a specially mean denial of help. It was the act of dead resignation: Nothing mattered. . . . Nothing counted.

A few more desperate steps; a few more times his arm reached out in search of help and support; a few more staggering steps. Then the officer fell to the ground. He could not march any more. It made no impression on anybody. The mud-heavy movement went on and on.

On such a road the soldiers would drop down, or they would sit down on the edge and stay until they died, or until some one picked them up. Sometimes they would freeze waiting.

The Austrian officer fell forward, his face straight into the mud. Nobody paid any attention. The column of prisoners was already about a hundred yards ahead.

Again the whistle blew. We mounted our horses and started on our way. We knew that we would reach that column of prisoners in a few minutes, and in a few more minutes we would pass them.

Being at the very end of the column, I saw the officer

lift his head slowly and, in the mud, try to crawl to the side of the road. A few steps behind, the lancer who had struck him was standing, holding his horse by the reins and still talking to his brother.

I asked him why he did not go on with the column. He explained everything to me, and pointed to the officer, who was lying in the road. "There he is," he said.

"Pick up your officer," I said. "Move him to the side of the road."

The prisoner obeyed with impersonal indifference, just as he had received the slap of the five fingers. The officer, begrimed with mud, and white in the face as chalk is white, lay there inert, breathing heavily, looking at the mud in which his feet lay.

I never saw him again; I never have known what became of him. The soldier-prisoner returned again to his brother, and they continued their slow emotionless gossip.

For what I did next I might have been court-martialed if a superior officer had overheard me.

"Your horse is in bad shape; she's sick," I said to the lancer. "I order you to walk to the next halt, Village K. Don't ride your horse."

I was giving him an opportunity to walk; to continue talking to his brother. The lancer understood me. His horse was all right. He took this with the same apathy, with the same lack of gratitude and lack of enthusiasm, as he had taken everything else that had happened before.

IV

HORSES

THE sound of the bugle was particularly cheerful one day. High-pitched, it rang clear into the sky.

We awoke. The sun was shining brightly, there was a light frost and every cloud had disappeared from the sky. The autumn was over. Winter was coming. The rain was over. It would be a dry cold from now on. Everybody was smiling, and each one, like a cat in the sun, was cleaning himself. We needed so little. A bright day, a full stomach and safety for the moment. We had been upset, exhausted and uncomfortable; a sunny morning and a bowl of hot soup brought spirits back again. All the unpleasantness of yesterday was forgotten.

The first sign of an awakening human spirit is a mutual understanding. Hungarian, German, Russian and Pole sat under the wall of a hut in the warm sun, and chattered peacefully, without understanding a word of one another's language.

The officers talked to the lancers, and the lancers talked to the officers in even cheerful voices. There wasn't any barking and grumbling.

The men greeted one another, and generously shared their food with the prisoners. Also soap, water, razors, and what the optimists among them called towels.

Under the trees, along the walls and fences, lancers discussed various ways of farming and the various qualities of soil in different places which they had visited during the war. It doesn't matter how militarism tries to make a

machine out of a farmer, the first thing he notices is the nature of the soil. A Siberian bearded giant would say to a Galician:

"Wonderful soil you've got in the Karpathian forest! Wonderful!"

And then he would slowly chew a mouthful of black bread generously sprinkled with salt, looking straight ahead of him at the distant horizon, into the black fields mutilated by the war, belch good-naturedly and, sadly shaking his head, would say: "But the soil of Siberian meadows, brother, is a damn sight better."

"A damn sight better," he would repeat.

The Galician would look doubtful, thinking of his own piece of land in Austria.

There would be silence.

Then the Siberian hastily would cheer him up.

"Don't you worry, brother, you'll be in Siberia in a month or so. You'll see for yourself."

The Galician would only smile feebly, wishing that he could compare the two soils in a less far-fetched manner.

News came that dinner would be ready at eleven o'clock—an unusually early hour. That meant something. Would we again move into the interior, or would we turn around and march into action?

Excited and curious, everybody tried to figure it out. It was different from the apathy of the previous dark and wet days. Everybody was ready for everything.

Then we learned that we were going to load the horses on to a train and go for a long rest, far away from the line of action. That was definite. The camp burst into wide cheerfulness, happiness, loud voices and songs. Even the horses seemed to smile. With rough jokes and shouting, with well-measured speed and energy, everything was packed and loaded before evening.

Our regiment was not a big one. After we were packed it took us just one hour to board the train with all the horses, munitions, luggage and forage. We still had time to say good-by to those left behind in hospitals, in prison camps. Almost every one of them got some sort of good-by present. Some of those departing even gave away the last few pennies they had because back in the country one somehow manages to find charitable souls. Lancers, being lancers, had to say farewell to those who had been good to them during their short stay. There were a few kind-hearted girls in the village, and it took some of the lancers more time to say good-by to girls than to load eight horses into a box-car.

On the train, for the first time, each man had a dry and clean place to sleep, though it was nothing but a hard bench. Only the officers had a sleeping coach. The privates had either box-cars with wooden berths, or the lucky ones going with the horses had a chance to arrange splendid beds of hay and straw.

The regulations did not permit a lancer to sleep on the hay which was to be fed to the mounts, else the horses wouldn't eat it. Making my rounds on duty, I found in one of the box-cars, four comfortable beds arranged on bales of hay. Four lancers saluted and waited in silence. I asked the lancers if they remembered the regulations. Shyly smiling, they told me that they had asked the horses; the horses didn't object at all to the lancers sleeping on the hay. The following day the horses would munch the hay and straw as if it had never been used for a bed.

Thus wisecracking, they looked at me, laughter in their eyes, waiting for an answer, knowing perfectly well that they had placed me in an embarrassing situation. I had either to say: "Extra hour on duty, and on the bunks—all of you," or not say anything, and violate the regulations.

In the first case I would be a poor sport, and in the second I would be guilty of breaking discipline.

I didn't answer, but approached the horses and examined them.

"Halter's too long. . . . Water pails are dirty. . . . Did you wash her eyes and nostrils? . . . The hoof on the right hind is loose. . . . The mane is two inches too long. . . . Is that a lancer's horse's tail or a cow's tail? . . . Buckle is rusty. . . . Smear that saddle with oil. . . . Blankets should be spread and hung, not folded and piled together. . . . There is a streak of dirt on his flanks. . . . Whose saber is this—see the rust on it? . . . Those reins will break, they need sewing together. . . . What's this? . . . Wash the tails and all around them properly," and so on, pointing out every speck of dirt and every minute irregularity.

The lancers looked at one another. I could pile a night's work of them. One of them gave a command under his breath, "Take those coats to hell off the hay and pile them up on the bunks." The other lancers obeyed as fast as they could.

I pretended not to pay the slightest attention to their actions, finding fault with everything, until I came to four bales of hay. They were stripped of coats and blankets. I took a handful of hay from each bale and smelled it. It was fresh and spicy. Good hay. Taking a handful from the fourth bale I made a face, with a twinkle in my eye.

"This hay is rotten—moldy—don't give it to the horses. Tell the quartermaster I ordered another one. Use this one for bedding."

I looked out of the corners of my eyes. The lancers' faces were beaming.

"For the horses, you rascals. For the horses' bedding," I said sternly.

"Righto, Sir Lieutenant," they answered in a chorus, their faces still beaming.

"The next time you want an easy life, use your own brains, not horses'."

"Righto, Sir Lieutenant!" they all shouted in their loudest voices.

I proceeded to the next box-car.

That particular night everybody slept. The train rolled ahead and stopped, as military trains do, irregularly, and for no particular reason. It ran through small villages, through the fields, across rivers, up and down rolling hills, into black and naked forests.

Everybody slept on. It was about noon the next day before the regiment was really awake.

We stopped at a small village in a valley between two broad low hills. The little group of houses clustered on the banks of a blue brook which ran through the bottom of the valley. The train stood on the side-tracks. The bugle for food was sounded, and lazy lancers, their faces swollen with sleep, jumped from every box-car, loaded with kettles and, stretching themselves in the sun, strolled leisurely toward the kitchen, which was the last car on the train.

Everybody got plenty. Everybody was happy. After a long sleep, almost eighteen hours, everybody felt that he was entitled to breakfast and lunch at the same time.

After each had received his share, the bugle sounded to board the train again, and there was one lonely figure left by the kitchen car. It was a lancer who was late, and now he was hurrying to get whatever was left for him. He got it and started back toward his car.

Suddenly he saw a young woman standing behind a tree. In spite of the bugle he had to stop and talk to her a little bit. He found out that she had tried to get on the train, but had been refused by the Sergeant. She was very much

upset about it. She wanted to get to the next town, normally about six or eight hours' ride. Word had come that her husband, whom she had not seen since her wedding-day, was wounded and in one of the hospitals, and that he would like to see her. She had a little basket filled with cheese and milk and bread and all the little things from home that would make him happy. It would take her two or three days to walk to the town, even if she did get an occasional lift.

The woman looked striking. She had a bright red handkerchief around her head, tied under the chin. A handsome black satin coat, tight around the bodice, fell to her knees in rich folds over a dark green skirt. Under the open coat showed a clean white shirt. Young and naïve, she made one think of a shining ripe cherry. She was so clean. You could almost see the red blood through the transparent skin of her round face, with its small nose and big clear blue eyes. Her mouth also looked like a cherry.

She knew there was little chance to get on the train now. But she would see her husband just the same. She would have to walk, that was all. She knew she would get to town some way. So she smiled.

The lancer talked to her. Perhaps it was the basket with its nice smelling home-made pies that attracted his attention at first. Perhaps it was the shy and lovely woman, a possible companion for the ride during the rest of the day. Anyway, he pointed out his box-car to her and told her to come toward it slowly, as if without aim. Then he ran ahead, jumped inside, and in no time at all four curious, homely faces, showing all their teeth, were peering from behind the door. In the brilliant sunshine the girl was slowly walking toward them.

The engine whistled.

The bodies belonging to the four heads leaned out as far

as they could, hanging by the door handles. In the flash of a second, four husky arms swung down, grabbed the girl and, as if she were a kitten, flung her inside the car.

The train started to move. No one had seen. The girl was very happy. She laughed. The inside of the coach was cozy. The four lancers were peasants, like those she had known all her life, and they found things in common to talk about.

There were four horses in the coach, good horses too. They were officers' horses. The four lancers were orderlies. They were an unscrupulous and happy lot, and in their own way, sophisticated. Being near the officers, and seeing their ways of courting and flirting with girls, they unconsciously copied their manners, and tried to be "civilized."

They made the girl comfortable. They arranged a seat for her on a pile of hay. They made her take off her coat. They put up some sort of screen of blankets so that if the train stopped and some one looked, she would not be seen. Then they proceeded to entertain her until the night fell. They told her stories, bragged about their courage, sang and played simple folk-songs on a harmonica.

Later they went to get their dinner, and naturally shared it with the woman. She gave them part of the good things from her basket. They liked them immensely—cheese pies, sweetbreads, apples, cream—the things they did not get very often. One of the lancers went out along the train and returned with a canteen of wine. Probably he had stolen it from his officer, and afterward would say that he had spilled it. So they had a feast.

Night came. There were no lights in the car, and the long darkness was ahead of them. The warmth of the horses kept them so comfortable that the door had to be left half-open. In another hour the light of a clear moon threw its beams across the floor, dividing the four horses

at one end of the car from the five people at the other.

There was less conversation now. In that silence the thud and rumble of the train sounded like monotonous warnings, and the horses' sighs seemed tense and vigilant. Born in every dark and shadowy corner, avoiding the moonlit strip, evil crept into the minds of the men, and they couldn't find words with which to disguise their thoughts.

More silence, long and ominous.

During the day the lancers had been happy to have some one with them who had never killed anybody, who was tender, who reminded them of sister or mother, somebody who had pity in her heart and tenderness in her voice, somebody who came to them with sunshine, who brought them the thing they had missed for long months.

But when the sunshine had gone, and the night had come, they forgot about all that, and began to think only of their hungry aching muscles, and of a soothing and tempting woman's body so close to them. Here it was, at an arm's reach, alive and pulsating.

The warmth of horses is a stimulating thing. Every one knows it, every one who has ever slept with horses. Their warmth is like no other source of heat. It isn't like fire. It is not like the warmth of an engine, of steam, or even of the sun. It is the deep red warmth of vibrating blood. Horses' eyes in the darkness have a dull green shine, and when they roll them, that sheen throws a little light on the whites of their eyes. It makes those eyes look big, and it makes you wonder if the horses know what you are thinking about. I believe that horses do think in the darkness.

In the darkness of the box-car, when the four lancers and the woman became silent, the horses began to think. Now and then one of them would turn its head around, inhale, move its upper lip and tremble with its sensitive and tender nostrils. That trembling is a sign of life, and

even more than life itself, it is a sign of the perseverance of life. It is a sign of the eternity of life. An emotion of life. A procreation of life.

Four mares and four men, but only one woman.

The lancer who was the shrewdest, proposed that they sleep. All agreed. They arranged bedding for the woman; they distributed themselves along the walls, and they all pretended to sleep. Each one of them was performing the act of sleeping as best he could. One or two even tried to snore.

Hours dragged on.

The one who had spoken of sleep crawled slowly and carefully toward the girl. Gently he woke her, and whispered. At first she was not afraid, but when at last she understood what he wanted, when she saw mad eyes close to her, when she saw wet lips and felt the breath of fever, she jumped up and would have screamed. From somewhere two strong arms pulled her down, and another face leaned over her and held her fast. With her full strength she shrieked. Still another arm lay heavily against her mouth, and twisted her head to one side until it hurt. She couldn't defend herself. She struggled, screamed, kicked and fought with her head, elbows and knees. In the darkness it looked as if a many-legged giant spider had got her.

The horses pricked up their ears and stepped heavily from one foot to the other. They were frightened of what was going on. Now and then the mad voice of one of the men would shout to quiet them.

The animals would listen, lay their ears low and quiet down. The fight proceeded. The woman did not give up until her arm was broken, her clothes torn to shreds, and her body covered with blood.

With the first light the men came to their senses. Not one of them looked at the woman, who was lying in the

corner of the car. Quietly, avoiding one another, they went about their duties. They rubbed the horses. They were particularly careful about those places where the horse doesn't like to be touched. They combed the manes and tails. They washed the nostrils and the eyes. They tenderly caressed them. They did not speak to one another, but they tried to do all they did better than usual.

After everything was done around the horses the first word was spoken. The pink light of dawn began to slip over the horizon.

"What shall we do now?"

They did not know whether the woman was alive or dead. But they knew that if they were found out in either case it was court martial and the firing squad. So one of them said:

"The only thing to do is to throw her out. Let us wait until we cross a river."

"Or maybe a forest," said another.

So they waited, looking into the disappearing darkness, and fearing that at any moment the train might stop in the middle of a flat field, before they found a way to dispose of the body. Suddenly the train came to the side of a hill and started to go around it in a wide curve. The hill became steeper and steeper.

"This is the place," said one of the men.

Without looking, they picked the woman up by the legs and swung her out of the door. Her body, clad only in a white shirt, turned over in the air and fell heavily on the soft yellow grass. It rolled down for about two hundred feet until it stopped in a ditch at the edge of a road.

Later that morning one of the four lancers went out to get breakfast for the others. He noticed that he had lost his identification plate. He had worn it around his neck on a string, and it was gone.

A passing artillery unit found the girl's body, and in the dead hand was grasped the lost identification plate. The regiment was located immediately, and the four orderlies arrested.

In a couple of hours they had been taken to headquarters, court-martialed and shot.

V

CHILDREN OF THE EMPEROR

So WE came to the city of Tchuguev for a long stay of rest.

In front of the headquarters of the regiment was a little yard with a neat, green painted wooden fence. Next door was the headquarters of the garrison. Stray soldiers lounged about in the sun; some of them came on business; some of them waited for news and gossip; everything was a little lax.

Suddenly came the sound of drums. The soldiers turned and looked. Along the street came marching a platoon of infantry. From the way they marched, from the precision of their movement and line-up, and from the neatness of their uniforms, every one saw that this was not a platoon of regular troops. These were cadets, of the Infantry Cadet School, which was two miles away from Tchuguev. Strong, healthy, sunburned. The youngest about seventeen. Dressed up in full field uniform. At a sharp command, like trained horses, confident and mechanical with long exercise, they turned into the yard and stopped. The Corporal went inside. For a short second he stood at the door and looked the room over. Among the clerks, lancers and officers, he spotted the Colonel who sat on a window-seat, made a few steps forward, stopped exactly three steps from him, as required by regulations, and snapped into attention. The Colonel rose and saluted. The Corporal of Cadets looked him straight in the eyes. In a sharp, loud and distinct military fashion he began:

"Sir Colonel, Corporal Matthew Rakoff of the First Company of the Infantry Cadet School, has the honor to report."

The Colonel dropped his hand from the visor of his cap and gave it to the Corporal. "Very well, Corporal." They shook hands. "What is your business?"

Blushing and stammering a little, the Corporal explained. Everybody was watching him, and it made him a trifle uncomfortable—not in military attitude—but in social. He came on a social mission, and a social mission from a Corporal of the Infantry to the Colonel of Cavalry is a serious task.

The Infantry Cadet School invited the officers of the Polish Lancers to dinner to-morrow.

The Colonel accepted courteously, took the Corporal around the room and introduced him to the officers present. Only in his eyes could you see sparks of his intense delight. He was shaking hands with officers who had just returned from the front.

We left the room and went into the yard in a group. The platoon of cadets snapped to attention. The Colonel walked slowly along the line, and each head followed him in unbroken uniform motion. After he reached the end of the line he came back and addressed the cadets.

"Cadets, I accept the honor of your invitation for myself and the officers of the First Regiment of the Polish Lancers. I take this opportunity to tell you, as an old soldier, that I'm delighted to see such a splendid body of young men. Well trained, disciplined and bright. Thank you, Cadets." He saluted.

The cadets roared as one voice coming from thirty throats: "Happy to try, Sir Colonel."

"Dismiss the platoon."

"About face!" On their heels. One clicking motion.

"March!" Thirty automatons marched off. Like one man. A beautiful show. Frederick the Great would have loved them.

But all about the little yard I saw the soldiers from near-by regiments, who had gathered around the headquarters and were now looking on, sulky and gloomy. There was no trace of the good-humored tolerance with which regular army soldiers would in other days have looked on the platoon of handsome new cadets.

Why this sudden peculiar antagonism on the part of the men, and where did they get it from? Did they see with an inner sight that in three months they would have to fight these cadets?

I knew some of these soldiers. Every single one of them had performed some humane deed toward his officers or comrade soldiers. I used to talk to them—some of them were from Moscow—and I, knowing that city well, could always find something in common with the tired homesick boys. The name of the street they used to live on would usually open their mouths.

Against the green palings leaned one of the Sergeants of the Regiment of Dragoons, who had shared the same trenches with us a year ago.

As a child, an orphan, he had been picked up by his regiment as a mascot. He had served through all ranks, until now, about forty years old, he was covered with every possible decoration. I knew him well. Once, retreating through "No Man's Land" where we had gone as volunteers—three privates, the Sergeant and myself—we were discovered, and one of the privates was fatally wounded in the abdomen by a machine-gun bullet.

We dragged him in turn from one shell-hole to another. It took all the force for good which I should like to believe is in me not to keep the body of that wounded soldier be-

tween myself and the line of fire. But whenever the Sergeant's turn came, without a second of hesitation, he held himself so that his healthy body covered the man, who, as he well knew, had only half a chance in a hundred to live. It never occurred to him that he could do otherwise.

We had to hurry. The search-lights were shooting all around trying to find us. We had to reach a very small opening in a barbed-wire entanglement and crawl through into our trenches.

According to regulations, I, as an officer, had to enter last. The privates with the wounded man went through. The search-lights came nearer. The Sergeant's turn was next. But he lay on the ground next to me, waiting. He said, "Go on, sir. You are stouter than I am. It will take you longer."

I began: "Don't waste time—crawl in . . ."

Almost brutally, he cut me short and said, "It is your first year in the war. It is my sixth." He had been through the Japanese war. "I know what I am talking about. Go!"

I went. I was very tired. It was my first experience under fire.

He came after me safely, and afterward he seemed not to know that he had done anything heroic or unusual. It was simply a natural action.

What had happened to this man now? Why did he stand leaning against the fence, smoking a cigarette and glowering with contempt at this performance? Was not this the kind of show in which he usually played as one of the best actors? Had he not adored this sort of thing all the rest of his soldier's life? Was not this the kind of behavior he had demanded strictly, and even cruelly, from all his subordinates?

He knew the regulations by heart. It was true that he

did not know anything outside of them. But he had lived and breathed by the regulations. Yet here he was with a heavy sidewise look, with unknown thoughts brooding in his face, while the impersonation of regulation was there right in front of him. Did he unconsciously feel that all the regulations would be torn to pieces in a very short time?

And so with the other soldiers. After the ceremony the soldiers dispersed, whispering, murmuring and sneering.

Surely there was among these men an unconscious premonition of approaching events. The Revolution had started long before its leaders said, "To arms, Comrades!" The army was like the man who has a typhoid germ but doesn't yet know that he is sick. He does as usual, but has an inkling that something strange is going on within him. The next day he is in delirium.

I remember their attitude struck me as something unusual—strange. I couldn't realize what it was. I followed a few whom I knew well. I had thought I could get anything secret out of the privates. When they had word of good news, or of troubles from home, they did not hesitate to come to me. But to-day I couldn't get a word out of them.

All my questions were evaded. And I quickly understood that I had better not try to make them talk. They were like different people. Between themselves and me they had built a wall. They considered me on the other side—even in the first rumble of the breaking dam.

The next night at the Cadet School I saw that a similar desperate instinct ran under the surface of all the bright energy of the boys. The school was gloomy, two hundred years old. It squatted low on the ground and was painted a cold gray.

The cadets of the infantry, clean and straight, were dressed up to receive us. They were clumps of beautiful

flesh, burning inside with one will: to show what beautiful soldiers they could be, and how eager they were to go to war. They talked to me and if I had heard no other secret voice, I'd have felt secure about the Empire and the Emperor.

In the hearts of these boys—the last and lost defenders of the Russian Emperors—blazed exuberant and rapturous love. *Ave Cæsar! Morituri te salutamus!*

As if Destiny knew that these children would be the last to carry the name of their Emperor to their graves—she gave them hearts so saturated with worship that when the hour struck—it was simple for those children, who had never known anything else—to die bravely and humbly. The mysterious hand of Providence was nursing its victims for complete annihilation with the royalist monarchic idea.

During the war the caste limitations so severely upheld in peace-time had lost their sharpness, except in very exclusive guard regiments, and cavalry schools. These boys came from different classes of society; among them were peasants as well as aristocrats.

For three years they had been brought up on headquarters communications and military routine. Good servants of His Majesty, they studied enthusiastically the fortunes and misfortunes of the campaign. They walked with them, and ate with them, and slept with them.

Each thought himself a savior of his country and a conqueror of cities. Their bodies moved with the ease of those who never know pain; their minds with the comfort of those who are free from doubts. They were coordinated in body and spirit, and full of joy.

They were the children of the Emperor, regulations and war. When they came out into the World in which was none of these three, they were as helpless as any child who has lost its parents.

We had come straight from the firing-lines and they looked at us with wide-eyed admiration. All they had and all they could afford was laid before us. Yet under the merry loud surface sounded dull and heavy chords. Like a man who has a headache and must work—the top of his mind attacks the job in hand with concentrated energy, while below are always the recurring throbs of pain.

I can't convey it. I am no Edgar Allan Poe. You have perhaps seen those German motion pictures in which a scene is conveyed by mixed planes, one on top of the other, and another on top of that, and still another over all, and all moving at the same time, some straight across and some up and down and some diagonally and some around in circles. In my memory that night stands like that. Mixed planes seen and remembered through a haze of wine. Or you can imagine the most fantastic product of a Cubist painter with all its planes in motion, with heads seeming to wander without bodies, with arms coming unexpectedly out of the smoke, with everything crowded and jumbled together. And all in a fog of wine and smoke. And if on top of that you will imagine half a dozen jazz bands each playing a different tune, you will have some idea of what happened.

There was no jazz band and the tables and chairs stood in their places, and arms stayed tied to people's shoulders, as did heads. But the confusion, the half-light, the noise, the constant talk and the constant restless movement, made in my mind a picture like one of these.

The lights were sharp and yellow, the shadows huge and black. The rooms spread out to the dim outline of distant dark and ghostly corners. Mighty rooms where half battalions could be maneuvered. Lonely rooms, separated from the rest of the world by ponderous walls eight feet thick, with buttresses and heavy low arches that made a distorted background.

The shadows of the walls stood still and heavy, but all the other shadows leaped and moved and made fantastic silly gestures. Everybody was smoking. The ceiling was low and the smoke hung like a soft storm-cloud above our heads, weakly fighting the electric bulbs that shone naked, without shades. Smoke would rise and cling around them like slow moving transparent balls of bluish-white alive cotton.

Each cadet and officer was dressed up in gala field uniform, high collar and all. Faces were perspiring. The toasts were hysterically endless. The health of the Emperor was drunk. Then it was drunk again. And again. And once more. And the Empress, and the dukes and duchesses, and the French forces and the British forces, and the Italian forces, and all the Allied forces and all their Emperors. Then, with a little less enthusiasm, that of the President of France and the President of the United States. But not until all the Emperors and their families had been mentioned.

The impetus toward adoration of rulers was so strong that afterward I wondered why they had not drunk the health of the Kaiser. Some of the officer instructors at the school belonged to regiments of which Kaiser Wilhelm had been an Honorary Chief before the war. They hadn't had much occasion to use their parade uniforms, and now I saw on their epaulets the marks of initials freshly removed—W II.

Each of our officers was surrounded by cadets, crowding on one another, asking questions with childish naïveté.

"How many Germans did you actually kill? How many decorations did you get? Have you ever gone into a hand-to-hand attack? Didn't you love it?"

Not one question about death, about wounds, about suffering. Not one remark about the people whom they would

leave behind—about the people whom they would cause to suffer. Not a single thought about the reasons for the war—or the ideas behind it. Nothing but:

"Long live the Emperor!" "Long live the Army!" "To the health of His Imperial Majesty, Commander-in-Chief of the Army!"

And "Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!" endlessly—endlessly.

There was nothing to drink but red wines. Red wine was everywhere. Each one held a glass with the red blood-like liquid; orderlies poured it into glasses as fast as they were emptied; there were splashes of red on the white table-cloth, and now and then on the floor.

Between toasts the cadets tried to show off as best they knew how. "I am going into the Emperor Paul's Regiment," said a boy with shining blond head, his voice trembling. "We three are going into His Majesty's Sharpshooters," almost shouted another. "My brother and I—both of us—my father was in Ismajloff's Regiment. My grandfather too. He got Saint George's Cross at Plevna."

"I have my epaulets already," said one shyly, close to my elbow. "So have I," they all called, almost in chorus.

Each boy knew the history of his destined regiment; knew in detail each battle in which it had been victorious. Each had its distinctive headgear already bought and tucked away in a drawer.

And each time this exaltation turned toward the beloved monarch and his family—absolute rulers—masters of life and of death—the beginning of and the cause of existence. *Ave Cæsar!*

Yet the cadets knew well that the Emperor was not a great military leader. They could not help knowing it. That could not dampen their love for him. There was a trace of mysticism in this. Almost children—in their dreams

they were in touch with a living person anointed by God.

These boys kept the portraits of the royal family as other boys would have kept those of sweethearts or parents. Some carried them about all the time, some hung them on their beds; some kept them in books or in frames or in drawers. It was a form of religion; it sometimes rose to ecstasy. It was a children's crusade.

The speeches of the officers who belonged to the school and of our officers who answered them, were dull and long, and all on the same subject:

Emperor—Army—War—Victory . . .

Emperor—Army—War—Victory . . .

After the third speaker I wanted to scream. None the less each speaker roused the crowd to fierce enthusiasm. The moment a man opened his mouth and started "Long live . . ." great cries would answer, cutting off the end of the sentence. If allowed, the cadets would have started right then on the run and gone straight into the firing-lines, with nothing less than Berlin as their aim.

Our officers tried as best they could to mix on even terms with the cadets and their officers. But Poles and Russians did not mix well; there was always a strain of oppressor and oppressed. Besides, the infantry and cavalry are, in all the armies of the world, polite to each other, in the depth of their hearts despising each other.

We would contemptuously say among ourselves, "Dusty marchers." They would speak among themselves, "If it weren't for horses' brains what would they do?"

Every one knew all this, and each one tried to pretend that he was the most courteous host, the most respectful guest.

But there was one among us who enjoyed himself thoroughly. Chmiel, a handsome young cornet in our regiment, was made of the same fabric as these cadets. He

was only a year away from a similar school, and was the baby of the regiment. About seven years younger than I, he called me "father." This was my nickname. According to military school traditions you called the oldest cadet "father." I had been twenty-four and the others at the Cavalry School had been eighteen and nineteen. The boys from the Cavalry School, who had come with me to the regiment, continued to call me "father." Chmiel, as a thorough cadet, immediately put that nickname into general use.

His only idea in life was to become the commander of a regiment. Like a little boy collecting stamps, he hoarded his decorations, beginning when he was ten years of age in the lower military school and finishing with the French *croix de guerre,* which he had recently received. This last, I suspect, our Colonel got just to make him happy.

He was a splendid lancer. In his profession he was serious. He studied all the military leaders he could lay his hands on. But in a larger sense he was ignorant. Outside the regiment there was nothing in the world for him. He had neither family nor friends. He intended never to marry. A woman to him was something which one, unfortunately, must bear with from time to time. Women liked him, but he was crude and cruel with them.

When he went into an attack he would draw up in front of his platoon. His hands, conspicuous in white gloves, carried nothing but a riding stick. He was never wounded. This night at the Infantry Cadet School lifted him on wings.

Now and then, especially after a toast, the whole bugle-call division of the school sounded the fanfare. Sixteen buglers, with cheeks like toy balloons and shiny faces, did their best. The shriek of brass under the low ceiling with its reverberating echoes, would make the walls ring. The towering sharp sound would almost break your ear-drums.

I try to find my way in memory through that night and

morning as one in a maze in the dark. The shining teeth, the polished wet red faces and the glittering eyes hovering in the smoke. So many of them.

And all, as unnatural as the gloom of the soldiers was unnatural. These cadets had an unconscious necessity to be so exuberantly happy.

And the soldiers had the same unconscious necessity for their gloom. The Cadet School had given them two barrels of wine. For a long time they had had none and it was a great luxury. Yet there was no feasting. They drank their red wine in bleak silence.

When the time came for us to return to our quarters, the buglers started to play the parade march of the school. A group of drummers joined them. The sound of piercing bugles and battering drums ricocheted from the ceiling and pounded the tops of our heads with penetrating and continuous persistence. I could not hear the voices of people talking to me, but saw moving lips and weird faces, contorted with smiles and grimaces. I was drowned in hellish noise. When I finally got out of the building and started to walk along the road, the sudden silence of the half-dawn of a winter day was painful by its contrast.

The snow was falling, and the road was clean and wide and shining. When I approached our quarters it was about five o'clock, and the soldiers were just getting up. They saw the officers coming home, they knew that we were full of liquor. Again I saw suspicious and gloomy eyes trying to avoid the straight gaze.

Nothing much happened for a few days except that the soldiers seemed to be always watching. Sometimes I saw sentries talking to civilians. This was strictly against the regulations and broke a rule seldom disregarded. That I did nothing about it shows how abnormal the situation was.

Always there were groups of soldiers whose talk hushed if an officer or a strange soldier came up.

In this city, on leave from the front, the great gray hero—the Russian soldier—got in touch with newspapers, telegraph and telephone, and learned what was going on at home. He was startled—stupefied—and began to think. For the first time I saw the seed of rebellion start to germinate. Here the Russian soldiers began to go with burning eyes, with tight bodies and set teeth. They were silent, but there was hate in their eyes. Jaws were set large. Strangely, they never blamed other nations.

The Revolution worked quietly, undermining the army. Every soldier who went home got underground information and propaganda. When he came back to the trenches he found plenty of time to discuss the news with the others. Wounds did not break down these soldiers—nor typhus, nor death, nor lice. Their spirit broke when they began to hear from home.

Once I overheard an argument between a Sergeant of the Artillery and Private Andrew Platoff. They were standing in front of garrison headquarters.

The Sergeant was annoyed. "You dumb-bell, I tell you that you can go home on leave next Monday."

The private looked at his boots. "Sergeant, may I be excused? Let somebody else go."

"Nobody else can go—you fool. It's your turn. You understand, your turn. Don't you want to go home?"

The man wriggled—embarrassed. "No, Sergeant."

"Why? You sap! Does your wife beat you?"

The private didn't like that joke. "No, Sergeant. She wants to talk to me, and I have nothing to tell her. She is writing me they have no food. They have no flour. No butter or oil. Four hours a day she said she must stand in line to get five pounds of bread and half a pound of

butter. And with that she must satisfy the children for three days. If I go home my wife will ask me questions. And, Sergeant, I'll have to answer them—to answer those questions one must start thinking."

The Sergeant frowned, but the frown did not reach deep below his wrinkles. "And if you do think, will that kill you?"

"No, but you can not make war thinking," the man said solemnly.

I knew four instances when men refused to go home on leave. They were thinking.

The gray mob on leave grasped every chance to get peace of mind—or simply—peace. They were like a child who has been given a brain as a Christmas present and immediately begins to play with that brain.

It was a nice new political brain—which grasped eagerly the elementary wisdom in three words—*Peace, Land, Bread.* They stopped the war immediately. They took the land over right away. And in all this excitement, they forgot about bread.

VI

CUCUMBERS

THE town was situated in the wide spreading prairie of the south of Russia, where the earth was black, with a deep top of fertile loam so generous that the soil needs no fertilizer at all.

The people hereabout were fair and blond—a kind, smiling, round people. The women were light-hearted and not too hard to approach. Jovial, hospitable people with wide open doors.

Life there was smooth and even. They asked no questions. They were not stupid, but they hadn't had any deep troubles to arouse thought. The government never had had any difficulty with these men, who were calm and comfortable in manner. Everything grew so easily. With two oxen and a flat expanse of land there was enough to support a family. The farmer had a good market for his grain—his prairies fed wheat to nearly half the world—so he could buy whatever he did not grow himself. He was good-natured; he loved animals; horses, oxen, cows.

He and his women wore bright colors. They sang and danced. They had tournaments of song—the best singers were honored. In the fall the whole prairie rang with song.

Among them were a few German colonies, with churches and clubs, which were exact replicas of villages in Germany. These lived peacefully for generations next to the prairie people, and when the war broke, nothing changed in the relations between them. Both continued to till their black acres.

Some of them went to the city every winter to work, but even so, they never mingled with city people. Gogol wrote about them. Lenin was one of them.

We enjoyed our rest in the town at the edge of a prairie. The routine was monotonous, but the officers had their amusements. To one of them a common and rather peculiar-looking elderly gentleman contributed unwillingly. He stays in my memory because I knew him personally at the time, and from legend afterward. These two weave together into one of those ropes of human story that are beyond explaining unless you know the separate strands.

He had a small estate not far from the officers' mess, and he also had a young and beautiful wife. This elderly gentleman raised and sold hothouse cucumbers. His greenhouses squatted for yards and yards, not more than six feet above the cold black ground. In special boxes were cultivated vines which produced a small variety of English cucumbers, highly profitable in the large cities. The old gentleman who owned the cucumber greenhouses was not like his jolly neighbors; his wife was.

Walking along near his place one day I heard a deep voice, pleasant, and a woman's. Laughter chased all shadows from its depths. I looked around.

One of my friends, a young and nice-looking Lieutenant, was standing outside the greenhouse exchanging jolly words with the old man's young wife, who stood inside.

There was a peculiar air about her, standing against the black earth of the greenhouse, in her yellow apron. Her rich red-blonde hair was a little disheveled, and waved like something alive in the breeze that rippled through the greenhouse. Her eyes were laughing eyes and her voice was deep, and she looked beautiful and yet a little bit poisonous, like a ripe orchid lying on the ground.

Their talk was ordinary, but it was one of those in which

the eyes say more than the lips. More and different. Much more and quite different.

It was clear that they were enjoying their chat because she had almost stopped her work (she was packing cucumbers in a basket) and, leaning across the shelf in front of her, had raised her face toward the open window. The neck of her dress was open, and the officer standing above her could see what was inside her bodice. She was showing herself off and she had no fear of the bright sunbeams. She seemed eager to be seen and adored. Every inch of her peculiarly white and tender skin, with pale green reflections of leaves on it, had a quality of phosphorus in the darkness. It was glowing but cool, bright but mellow.

I moved away, not wanting to disturb them, when in a greenhouse parallel to the first one I saw her husband walking up and down picking up a leaf here and there from the vines. Silently and quietly he went about, trying not to betray his presence. He looked like a spider covered with hair, his eyes spying and prying into everything. Although the greenhouses were very warm, he wore a heavy vest, a coat and an overcoat, a big muffler about his throat, and thick rubber shoes on his feet. His hands were small and red and short,—feelers which kept moving all the time, not exactly doing anything but testing and feeling everything that he came close to. He would walk first along the section of the greenhouse which was closed, and then he would stop at an open window and pretend to be occupied with a plant, but actually he was listening. He was listening to the laughter and the happy voice of the flamboyant creature he owned. I watched him for a while and saw his lips twisting and his fingers nervously playing with dirt.

Then he noticed me, and I began to talk to him. He was pretentiously polite and obviously insincere.

Afterward neighbors told me about that couple, and the

story was so obvious that it could not be used in any fiction. Her parents were poor; he was rich. She was young; he was old. She wanted children; he couldn't have them. He was very jealous, and she had a most dreadful life.

I exchanged a few words with him about the weather and the quality of his cucumbers. He had to answer. His wife heard his voice and broke off her conversation with my friend. She went on with her work—packing her basket. Doing this she started to sing the slow moving, sad song of the prairies:

To-day is a rainy day,
Rainy day in the prairie.
One can not work,
One can not love,
On a rainy day in the prairie.

Her voice was dreamy, and like rich cream.

A few days afterward we were served a dish of beautiful fresh cucumbers at the mess dinner. Everybody enjoyed them. A few days passed, and again a dish of crisp fresh cucumbers was served for dinner. Then again and again, until we were indifferent to cucumbers.

They weren't in season, and the old Colonel, being in a grumpy mood one day, turned to the steward and said, "Don't you think we have had about enough cucumbers these last three weeks?"

The steward answered that the first lot had been presented by Lieutenant K., and the second lot by Lieutenant L., and the two next by two other officers. Everybody looked at everybody else, and the Colonel asked:

"Did you inherit a cucumber farm, gentlemen?"

Lieutenant K. smiled coyly and answered, "I received them as a gift, Colonel."

The Colonel shifted his eyes to Lieutenant L.

"Just a memory," said Lieutenant L., looking into a plate with a crisp long cucumber on it. The other two officers occupied themselves with their food.

The whole mess burst into a roar of laughter. By this time we all knew the origin of the cucumber gifts. Our laughter did not stop the supply of cucumbers. They came in regularly every three or four days from different officers.

One Sunday the steward entered the room at the beginning of dinner with a really enormous and superb dish of fresh cucumbers, and in a solemn voice announced: "With the compliments of the Colonel," at which the Colonel coughed a little, and rather annoyed, said, "Just passing the market. I saw them and thought they looked rather fresh."

We nearly choked on the food, trying not to laugh. After all, the Colonel was a colonel.

That was the beginning of the story, but to finish it I have to jump over a few months. After the Revolution the owner of the cucumber greenhouses became the executioner of the Extraordinary Revolutionary Tribunal of that town. When prisoners, especially officers, were condemned to die, he would announce the sentence to them, load his gun before them and shoot it straight between their eyes. But the cartridge he had loaded into the gun was always a blank.

The prisoner, convinced that he was about to get a bullet in his brain, would brace himself for it, would go through the torture of waiting. And nothing would come.

After the cucumber grower had laughed heartily over his joke, the prisoner would be disposed of in the regular way.

They say that a number of prisoners died of heart failure. And they say also that these were the only cases where the cucumber grower, so happy and busy, was thoroughly upset. Certainly no officer had any chance with him.

Historians may exhibit this as a typical human depravity. But we who were close to it knew better.

VII

THREE SILENCES

One night, when I was sleeping soundly, my orderly woke me with a message. I was to go at once to the regiment's headquarters.

"What about?" I asked.

As though afraid some one might hear, he looked around and whispered hoarsely, "The Emperor has abdicated." Then he waited, rubbing his forehead as if trying to get used to the thought. "The war will be over now," he concluded, looking at me.

In his mind it was the Emperor who was making war; it was the Emperor who had the power to make war, to make people die and suffer.

Emperor abdicated.—War over.

He wasn't sure whether it was safe to repeat the news. But he knew whatever came of it, it would mean the end of the war.

Bewildered, I dressed quickly and hurried down the street. The headquarters were in the schoolhouse. I found about fifteen officers assembled. They all stood or walked about talking to one another in half-voice, in a large room which had been used as a classroom.

All the little benches were just as they used to be, and there was a small pulpit and the teacher's desk. Here sat the Colonel—and he seemed to belong there. He always was as much teacher as commander. Kind, and at forty-five a sort of father to us. He was a bachelor and the regiment was his family.

The lancers liked him. He was stern; he never broke his word and he never lied. And the men knew that it was no use lying to him. To the man who told the truth he gave all chances he deserved; but he was merciless to any man who tried to cheat. He was an ardent lover of horses. He took close care of them, and he asked each lancer to take care first, of his horse, and second, of himself. Maybe I am exaggerating, but I think to him the chief disaster of the Revolution was that people stopped taking care of horses. He was a descendant of an old noble family; very simple in his habits. Probably it was because of this simplicity that he wasn't an officer of the Emperor's Guard.

Now he sat at the teacher's pulpit in that bare schoolroom. The shutters were drawn. The room lay in shadow. A frivolous lamp with a pink silk shade was the only source of light and it was standing high above the pulpit. The Colonel, under that lamp, was studying a telegram which was spread on the desk.

In twos and threes more officers arrived. Here in the corner, leaning against a wall, was Major Butt, with his black waxed mustache. Here stood young Lieutenant Chmiel, as always erect and eager. Lieutenant-Colonel Sultan walked back and forth—a descendant of Tartar Kings, whose family had become Polonized four generations ago; with him entered another officer of the same rank, a lone person, Lieutenant-Colonel Lann, short and thin.

One of the last to come in was Count G., who despised the whole world and thought that risking his life was a form of sport. He was the proudest among us.

Behind him came Lieutenant Rar, with his intent dark face, and young Mukke, who thought he would be another Napoleon. Last entered the surgeon, Doctor Kraj, in his underwear, with military coat over it. He looked dazed. He was deaf and had no idea what all this was about.

When almost all had assembled the Colonel said: "Sit down, gentlemen."

And the whole body of the officers sat down in those small and uncomfortable school benches which had been built for ten-year-old children. Every one had heard the word "abdication." Each knew that only some vital import in that word would make the Colonel call this meeting in the middle of the night. Therefore, each man was silent.

Each man sat as quietly as he could on his little cramped bench. Like real pupils awaiting word from the teacher, these grown-up men were watching and waiting for the beginning of something from the Colonel.

For ten minutes the Colonel held that silence.

He was nervous. No one of us had ever seen him nervous before. He was the kind of man who would climb into an observation nest, take out his field-glasses and expose himself to his waist for several minutes, examining the trenches of the enemy and not paying the slightest attention to the whistling bullets. Under such circumstances he was not nervous at all.

To-night the whole expression of his face was of the utmost concentration. His eyebrows were drawn together, and his eyes kept shifting here and there at irregular intervals. He felt about thirty pairs of eyes fixed on him, and he couldn't look into any of these straight. It was probably the first time in his life that he did not know what to do.

His left hand was on the guard of his saber. Now and then he would lift it and press it to his side as if it were a most precious thing which some one wanted to take away from him. In the stillness we heard the cloth of his sleeve scraping against the guard.

That silence, and for him that torture, lasted until, with a strained effort of will, he coughed a few times and said:

"Attention, gentlemen!"

Which was absolutely unnecessary because there was nothing else in the room but attention. His voice broke a spell and each one moved in his seat and leaned forward. Then the Colonel took the wire from the pulpit, and we all saw that his left hand, which held it, was shaking. He saw it himself, and he had to steady it on the pulpit. That again took a few seconds, during which the room seemed crowded with men's breathing.

The Colonel took hold of himself, and began to command the situation. Once more he said: "Attention, gentlemen!" And then went on: "A wire from headquarters concerning His Majesty. I propose that you rise, gentlemen."

Like school children we rose and stood now at attention.

And the Colonel read the words of the official wire announcing the abdication of the Emperor, Nicholas II.

A sad and dignified document of a tired man—who couldn't stand any longer the burden of "By the Grace of God" and who tried desperately to save his only son from the same burden.

The Colonel read slowly as if trying to stamp every word into our memories. The moment he finished reading, the old Colonel finished also his career and his life. He knew that there was nothing else for him to do but to await the end. And suddenly he became calm. He made the sign of the cross on himself, and kindly and quietly said: "Sit down and smoke, gentlemen." We did so.

A silence fell, heavy and solid, hard to bear for long. Then came one word in a quiet and clear voice: "Coward!"

We all knew the voice, but we turned and looked startled at Count G. He stood by the wall, as usual alone and proud. He could forgive kings anything except the desire to stop being kings. His whole life and thoughts were concentrated into a worship of tradition, aristocracy, hereditism.

He was a living example of a man "by the Grace of God." He could trace his ancestry back eight or nine hundred years. In his line were bishops and senators, and even famous writers, if only biographers. He despised the one who would give up and betray what had come to him "by the Grace of God."

Now he handed down his judgment. The abdicated Emperor was nothing to him. Coward!

I looked at him and thought: "Darn good theater." I realized how annoyed he would be if some one had told him so—and I felt an urging wish to do it. I had to use all my will-power—to keep serious and silent. I must explain this peculiar feeling of mine toward Count G.

I belonged to the theater, and I made no secret of it. To the Count, the theater was still an occupation for people who are buried outside the cemetery walls. For the first three months he didn't notice me at all, but after he found out that I was like everybody else and that I carried my spurs in the same way as those with ancestry, he began to greet me. But he never went beyond, "Good morning!"—"Good afternoon!" and "Good night!"

Now, after the Count had shattered the silence, he waited for a reaction. Nobody answered. He clicked his spurs, and said in a casual voice: "Colonel—gentlemen officers——" And walked out.

In some mysterious way he disappeared the next day. How he managed nobody knows, but he went straight across about a thousand miles to the south of Russia, which was all in the hands of rebels, and through the Austrian lines. He landed in Warsaw where his mansion was occupied by Germans. With one gesture, so to say, he dismissed the whole war out of his existence. From his point of view it was not cricket.

After Count G. had made his exit, the men, one after

another, rose and approached the Colonel to ask him questions and to make suggestions. This they did in a quiet and secretive way, as if they were not sure whether these things might be discussed aloud. The Colonel answered them kindly and courteously with monosyllables.

"Yes." "No." "No doubt." "I have no reason."

Lieutenant-Colonel Sultan sat still in his seat for several minutes—a smile on his really noble and thoroughbred face. The blood of the Tartar Kings seemed to flow slowly into his heart, and his kind eyes looking back into the ages, he found not one of them who would have abdicated. His courage was fabulous—his kindness and soft-heartedness humorous.

His wife was a Frenchwoman. She followed him wherever he went. She was the only woman who would appear among us, even when we were in the straight line of fire. He never took leave of absence. He had plenty of her right there on the spot.

About a year after this night, he was surrounded by the Red troops, who outnumbered him. His cartridges gone, he threw himself with his horse against the machine-gun fire and, with heedless courage, galloped through the lines of Reds firing straight into his face. His orderly and another private followed him. About a hundred yards beyond the lines the orderly was wounded and fell from his horse. Sultan turned his own horse around, picked up the orderly, put him in front to protect him with his own body, and started to gallop away. A few bullets reached him, and next morning the wounded orderly brought to the White encampment the body of Lieutenant-Colonel Sultan.

To-night, though an absolute royalist, he kept smiling. He said nothing until one of the officers remarked in a speculative whisper that this abdication released officers from their oath. Sultan rose and answered in a soft voice.

"I gave my oath to the Emperor before I knew whether he would be good or bad. Whether he would abdicate or not. I gave my oath to the Emperor . . . I will stick to it."

Now there was a babel of discussion. The problem was beyond their comprehension. They were not stupid people. They could talk in general terms of many things, but they cared nothing about what was going on in the world. Politics especially were taboo in the army.

They knew how to suffer, and certainly knew how to die. They were well-mannered and excellent soldiers. Now they were faced with something too big for them.

Some of the officers took the position that the Emperor had not the right to abdicate; that he had given his oath of allegiance in the same way as themselves, and that they would not believe in any dispatch until they received direct orders personally from the Emperor. The wire had been signed by the temporary government.

They were obviously Whites right from the beginning. To them the question was one of principle. They had given their oath—they could not break it. They all assembled around Lieutenant-Colonel Sultan.

Another group gathered around Major Butt. In a loud and booming voice, he spoke up. "It looks like rebellion, but if a man is rebellious it isn't his fault."

Sultan smiled, and courteously said: "No? Whose fault then?"

"The fault of those above him," thundered Butt. "I have been handling peasants for the last twenty years, and God knows how long my forefathers have handled them before, and we never had any rebellion on our estate."

Which was true. Major Butt was about forty-one, a big and successful landlord who went to war with three orderlies, six horses, a pack of hounds, his little cellaret of wines

and a cook. He had not the slightest idea about military life, about discipline or the respect which one rank requires from another. He was a jovial soul, always ready to help. He would slap the Colonel on the back, usually at a critical moment, and propose a magnificent fox-hunt. In his childhood some one had told him that some of his ancestors had been good soldiers, and so he considered himself one. It is true that he always rode ahead of everybody; and it is true also that he never retreated in front of anything. He was one of very few who were always for the under-dog. It wouldn't have occurred to him to mingle with the rabble; yet every soldier, no matter how insignificant, could go to him for help.

But God forbid lest any human being approach him, even in the last extremity, when one of the Major's dogs was sick.

Now about him gathered a small group of those who thought that there must be a solution. After all, they pointed out, there were a few responsible republics in the world. So early they knew that there was no compromise between the absolute monarchy and a republic.

This group tried to find out the legal aspects of the issue; it tried to figure out what would be the legal way to announce the news to the soldiers; and the legal behavior for themselves; and what should be their attitude toward the continuation of their military service.

Most of the officers agreed with Sultan, a few stood with Butt in his mildly liberal attitude.

One officer stood alone. This was Lieutenant-Colonel Lann, a short man and thin, with a narrow face and a small mustache. He had small eyes and a long, sharp, narrow nose, a small mouth, and his little hands seemed made of steel. He was one of the best riders in the army, and had won many prizes. But he was the lowest kind of human

being. He was mean and merciless; it was nothing for him to commit unnecessary cruelty. But lower than that, there was nothing in the world which he liked or worshiped. He was always suspicious, always afraid that some one wanted to put something over on him.

The horses were afraid of him, and he would never go into the stalls to bring them out. The orderly would always do it for him, but when he was mounted, the horse knew that it must obey. Perhaps he felt that if a horse could trap him in the stall there would be no quarter for him. I never could learn what his sympathies really were. He had no friends.

Now in his short abrupt voice he spoke of military duties, but there was no enthusiasm. And he was not putting himself on one side or the other. As always, he was watching with his narrow eyes. He was acting from habit, not from thought.

The rest of us tried to mobilize our thoughts and make them act—but in vain. All our words seemed automatic; our actions but half-conscious. Only one man was there who seemed to know what he was doing. And suddenly we heard him speak.

For us the Revolution really began with the words of Major Bass.

The reading of the headquarters' wire—that slow reserved way of receiving the news—that first silence—that talk with subdued voices—how to take it—what to do—all that suddenly belonged to the past. All that was from the days where sleeping minds were leading minds.

Tall, a little bent in the shoulders, Major Bass stepped out from among the other men; his strong and commanding voice rang into one dozen minds. Instantly we were awake. Every head turned toward him.

"Gentlemen, don't you realize what has happened. . . .

This is no question of a temporary government. . . . This is no question of an Emperor. . . . This is no question of a Parliament. . . ."

With intense vehemence his words swept along. All other voices gradually closed, and another silence came. The second of that night. This now was a silence that was dense and tense around one tingling voice. It emphasized the loud speech of Major Bass. For five or ten minutes he spoke in that silence.

His eyes were a light steel blue—the color of the eyes of George Washington. He looked rather like a good English sportsman; blond hair and a reddish ruddy face, that made his eyes look almost white. We never saw him without his headgear, and he was always smoking a cigarette. That he should speak at all was a sign that something stupendous was going on in this man. It was probably the first time that he had ever started to speak without being asked.

Now he dominated the whole room, the silly little pink lamp-shade right behind his head. He stood in front of it so that we could not see his face well, but he was like a black silhouette with a halo around his head, and his short gestures would project for a short time and would disappear like black lightning.

"This, gentlemen, means the emancipation of one hundred and fifty million people. It means new rights, and new liberty. It means that now no longer will people be stunted in spirit. It means each man will have rights which will bring out the good and the great which are now buried in the hearts of the people."

No one knew what he was talking about. We did not even seem surprised. It was only afterward that we realized how astonished we had been.

The slow uncertain atmosphere of our first hearing of

the news disappeared. The change was like that from a slow waltz to a maddening jazz. Major Bass was the first man who started within me the feeling of the revolutionary tempo.

The words, "bourgeois," "serfs of capitalism," "traitors to the people," fell upon our silent heads. He did not speak of any hate. He accused nobody. He was no enemy of the Emperor who had abdicated. No. He talked only of the future. How this man figured out that that wire was genuine, that it was the end of the monarchy—that this very minute things were to begin—none of us could guess or learn.

Rumor was that Major Bass was the illegitimate child of a famous senator. He was undoubtedly brilliant. He always kept apart from the social life of the regiment. He walked alone; he rode his horse alone; he had a few books which he read alone. He probably felt that while he was respected formally, the word "bastard" might be said on small provocation. But he knew how to make people respect him. Always stern and exact in his words, he never gave any one a chance either to argue with him or to draw him into an argument. We learned afterward that his knowledge of sociology and of revolutions was profound. In the days that followed, when only emotions ruled, speakers in meetings would shout and spit out insults, piling up abuse until they foamed in frenzy, and until the listeners yelled for vengeance and blood. In this turmoil, Major Bass would calmly mount to the speaker's place; he would sit down easily, and with professorial quiet, his voice would start to talk sense to the crowd of raving, feverish, drunk-on-freedom men.

For ten minutes the second silence held, broken only by this clear vehement power, saying unheard-of things.

Then a voice tried to interrupt him. Others shouted

here and there. Gradually they had realized that what Major Bass was saying was not fitting for an officer. It was something that might do for students and workers, and for all other crazy revolutionaries, but it was not for the officers of His Majesty's army.

Passion started to grow, and in a short time the flames were raging all around that tall bony figure. Major Bass did not stop talking for one second; possessing a tremendous voice with excellent diction and enunciation, he kept himself heard above the voices of at least twenty people.

Some of them argued with him directly. Some of them tried to convince the Colonel that he must stop this talk. The Colonel tried in vain to address Major Bass.

From that first argument there in that classroom, at four o'clock in the morning, one could realize which side would be victorious. The way the voices sounded told the story. Sharp, and like shots on one side. And on the other the murmur of all the rest of us, like the light noises of trees in the wind—a sound with no vitality to it.

And now Major Bass, seeing that all were against him, that they wanted to stop what to him was the whole of life inside his heart, dropped his general proclamation of human rights and switched into personalities. Looking straight into our eyes, he began to tell each man what he was. He was merciless. He told Butt that he was foolish and a parasite. He told Chmiel that he should be spanked and made useful at least as a stable-boy. He told the surgeon, Doctor Kraj, that he knew nothing about medicine.

This wasn't like him at all, but he was like a wildcat surrounded by a pack of wolves; he realized how hopeless it was to talk about the high and human aspects of the Revolution to these people. For them it was a question of the uniform and of a traditional position; nothing else.

Danger crackled in the air. The men crowded around him. They had come without weapons; otherwise Major Bass would have been shot right there. The Colonel had a gun because he was in full dress, but he was the quietest one of us all. A few of the youngsters crowded up close to Major Bass and began to exchange insult for insult, shouting "Traitor." "Court-martial him." "Hang him."

Sharp and heavy blows on the door, which started to crack suddenly, topped the tumult. The door was latched. It broke open with a bang, and somebody stood on the threshold. At first we couldn't recognize him. But while all heads were turning around and the shouting for a second stopped, the figure said quietly,

"Good morning, Citizens!"

Whereupon fell the third silence of that night. A minute dazed and empty of sound. The man who said, "Good morning, Citizens!" was a common soldier from the One Hundred and Fourteenth Regiment of Russian Infantry. He was considered worthless as a soldier; he was always dirty; nothing about him was the way it should have been.

But there he stood now, a picture of smashed rules and broken regulations. His cap was shifted over one ear; his collar unbuttoned; his overcoat tossed over his shoulder. In his belt he sported two automatic Brownings. And somewhere he had got the long trousers, which it was only an officer's right to own. Soldiers wore boots, but officers were permitted long trousers.

It was the worm which had turned. It was the louse which said, "This is my shirt."

We watched him in that dazed silence. He walked through the room, deliberately toward the Colonel, and spoke in a sort of stagy voice. It sounded as if he had studied a part for a long time, but being a poor actor, he had to make an effort to get it across to his audience. He

tried absurdly to be aristocratic and nonchalant. With a sort of barbarous elegance he said:

"Citizen Colonel, I am a representative of the local Assembly of Soldiers and Workers. I am deputized to take over my duties as the representative of the soldiers in the functions of the garrison."

He held in his hand a wire from the Left-Wing Socialists and Communists. Our wire had come from the temporary government; while it was trying to announce the change legally, the Left Wing worked in its own direction. Promptly, it sent word to its scouts to organize soldiers, workers and peasants into assemblies, and to demand participation in all operations, including military affairs.

And so, Private Tchuek was putting himself next to the Colonel, at the head of a proud and famous regiment. Because he wore long trousers it was obvious that he meant business. The Colonel did not say a word, but Chmiel jumped up at once. In an almost hysterical outburst, he shouted:

"Salute, you son of a bitch! . . . Thirty days on bread and water!"

The Colonel interfered: "Cornet, you are in the presence of higher ranks."

Chmiel saluted silently. He was shaking and convulsively looking for a gun or something with which to hit, to smash, to kill, while Tchuek, both hands on the butts of his guns, looked at Chmiel with a sneer and a smile. Then he turned his back to him and said to the Colonel:

"I think we had better dismiss the Citizen Officers. They are too God damned nervous seeing that the end of their power has come. You, Citizen Colonel, and I have many things to talk over. The Political Commissioner has called a meeting of the garrison for eleven o'clock this morning. I want to be ready and in full accord with whatever ideas you

may have. From now on we will have a real revolutionary spirit. And unity in command."

We were suddenly ridiculous, like a man who is standing on a carpet in great dignity when somebody suddenly pulls the carpet from under him.

What the end might have been I do not know, but quietly Major Bass interfered, speaking to Tchuek:

"It is late now, and every one is tired. If we must have a meeting at eleven o'clock I propose that we adjourn now. We will all think over the situation, and come back fresh in a couple of hours."

Without saying a word to anybody he turned around and walked off, composed as usual. Tchuek, like a little dog which has heard the voice of his master, followed, trying vainly to walk in step with him. They had scarcely disappeared behind the door when in the right corner of the room somebody began to laugh, in loud hysterical outbursts.

It was Lieutenant-Colonel Lann. He moved toward the center, his head thrown far back, mouth wide open and face red. He slapped his thighs with his hands, and with every slap laughed in a higher and stronger pitch. I thought his throat would burst, when finally he started to talk:

"Gentlemen officers! His majesty, Private Tchuek, has your oath from now on. You did not know what to do with it. He got it. He got it, I'm telling you . . ." Like a drunken man he swayed toward the door, holding in both hands the broken frame of it until his fingers were blue. He continued to shout, hoarse and exhausted now, with painful mockery, bowing his head many times:

"Good night, Citizens! Good night, Citizens! The meeting is to-morrow, Citizens. Good luck, Citizens—Citizens——" Muttering, he disappeared.

The rest of the officers, speechless, walked out slowly into the cold gray morning, back to their quarters.

I fell into a sort of exhausted slumber for a few hours without taking my coat off. I knew that I could get only three or four hours' sleep before that meeting and I wanted to rest. I did not feel in the least excited.

When I decided to go to war, I remember the keen spur, the vitality, and the joy I felt in taking a part in this enormous novelty. Now I knew that a thing really enormous was about to happen. But I was three years older and I was calm and not interested. It was apathy. What would come to pass was as inevitable as death. I knew that I did not like either side. I knew that I could not change anything in the slightest degree. With these thoughts I fell asleep.

When I awoke some one was gently pulling my leg and twisting it. I opened my eyes and saw my orderly sitting on a small bench at the end of my cot; with a brush and rag he was trying to clean and shine my boots without waking me up.

"Well, Watzek," I said, "I presume there won't be any more orderlies now, and I don't see any reason why you should do that."

He answered: "Oh, I don't know. I guess a nice shiny boot is something good to look at. You know there's nobody else can make them shine as much as I can."

"Yes, that's true, but maybe they will ask you to command a regiment now," I said, and he was delighted.

"Oh, Sir Cornet, I would just give one command: Left about face, home, and don't stop on your way." And he laughed in a happy childish way.

"Well," I said, "maybe that will be just exactly what we will hear. Anyhow, as long as times are changing so and everybody is much freer now, I want you to know that I didn't make you my orderly and I didn't ask for you. You were assigned to me and I had to take you, or anybody else whom they assigned to me. I want you to know that I consider you perfectly free now, and you can do whatever

you think you should. I don't expect you to do anything for me from now on."

And he, with his funny round shrewd face, answered me: "Oh, I've felt very good behind you, and I don't see any reason why I should change my position until I see something really better in front of me. So far I've been satisfied with my boss. If a new boss comes I'll have to look him over first."

I felt very silly. I don't know why. I started to think, "What is the proper way to act during a revolution? Are you supposed to shake hands with your orderly or not? Would that be a gesture, a stage effect, or would it be the real thing?" All the French revolutionary characters were crowding into my mind, and vainly I was trying to figure out "Where do I really belong? Where do I come in? How do I act from now on?"

And to tell the truth, I was envying simple limited Watzek, who formulated the whole thing so simply. "So far I've been satisfied with my boss. If a new boss comes I'll have to look him over first."

Maybe the trouble was that I really hadn't realized that I had a boss before and did not want to have one now. And at the same time I knew that one who did not recognize some sort of boss would be lost in the approaching tumult.

VIII

ORDER NUMBER ONE

LATE that morning came a sudden change of weather. A heavy and steady wind blew from the south, bringing with it sleet, rain and streams of muddy water. Clouds were moving fast and so low that one almost felt that they could be touched from the central tower of the main infantry barracks.

The top of that tower, dark yellow, tarnished—and time-bitten—was about the same color as the clouds. That's probably why they seemed so low. Dark yellow—dull in high lights—threatening in shadows—bulging as if pregnant with all the waters of the universe. Those heavy clouds were mere helpless mists in the powerful clutches of the wind.

The wind, suddenly warm and changeable, strong and jerky, threw them around, mostly toward the north, but if you looked at them you would never suspect that they were moving north. They flew in circles; they rolled down to the earth, dragged by rain, met half-way by big flocks of ravens and, as if carried on their black wings, soared suddenly upward. Then one could see deserted wet streets, and gray figures in gray army coats, with gray faces, going aimlessly, but like the clouds, in one general direction, toward the infantry barracks.

Sometimes the wind would push the men forward—they would go faster. Sometimes the wind would try to stop them; then their overcoats would fly high up in the air, straight from the shoulders where they held them with wet

and slippery fingers. Sometimes the wind would attack sidewise from a narrow street and push a soldier to the edge of the curb where the street had overflowed with water. The soldier would stop at the very edge, and try to turn around and walk again, when another gust of wind would lift his overcoat, and throw it into his face—blinding him—and making him helpless and lost at the rim of a ditch of running water. And the soldier would walk backward for a few steps, trying to uncover his face, to see where he was and in what direction he was to go.

Just as the clouds could not lose their main drive toward the north, so the soldiers, steadily and slowly, were moving toward their goal—the infantry barracks.

The vast hall of that building, used for the exercise of the town's whole garrison, was crowded with about five thousand men. There were a division of artillery, two infantry regiments; there were privates from engineering troops, clerks from different headquarters and supply units, and many civilians. Crowds stood about outside of the hall on the muster grounds. They were watching the newcomers and discussing the event.

We arrived in formation—all officers in their places, the only unit that came to the meeting with an appearance of army discipline and spirit. We stopped in front of the entrance, and the Colonel turned around and looked over his beloved lancers before dismissing them. We stood at attention, silently; the mob was watching us, and suddenly a loud voice came from somewhere.

"Still playing at war, Comrades? It's time to stop it."

In the flash of a second the Colonel topped that voice with a command like the crack of a whip, "Lancers, left about face." The regiment turned. After a short pause, the Colonel continued: "Lancers, left about face." We turned again. Silence. "Thank you, boys."

Two hundred men, strong in their feeling of united power, of a clear and proud understanding of their leader, who they knew was always in front of them and the best among them, rewarded him with a shout which came like the blow of a blacksmith's hammer, like a rhythmical discharge of thunder.

"Happy to try, Sir Colonel."

"Dismissed," he said, and firmly moved toward the entrance.

As we entered the hall, one by one, we were met by waves of a nauseating smell of excited humanity, steaming wet overcoats and tunics, and waves of eager, harsh and uneven talk.

The Revolution had come. An outburst. A foolish energy, like the blow of the fist of a madman.

All these weary people, spiritless before, suddenly were as though they were shot through with lightning, as though transferred into the middle of a roaring torrent before a broken dam. Nobody talked, everybody shouted. There were no sentences of fifteen or sixteen words; only bursts of three or four words each.

An improvised rostrum was at one end. The Socialist scouts were swarming around the rostrum, talking loudly, arranging papers, ordering people around, always keeping a watchful eye on one corner of the hall—where the cluster of officers from all the regiments kept together as if guilty of something, as if already doomed.

Unconsciously, they drifted toward each other, and flocked together. They might have left, but they stood there as if hypnotized by a coming martyrdom. The soldiers were walking around them, obviously showing off a newly acquired freedom, and displaying ostentatiously every broken rule of discipline. Already two factions had formed: "White Hands" and "Calloused Hands." And

they looked into each other's eyes and knew that only death could separate them.

Most of the officers were silent. The soldiers were talking loud. Where words or voice gave out they used exaggerated gestures. Talking, they pushed each other, held each other by the shoulders, hands or lapels. They became hot and perspiring, they unbuttoned everything they could. These soldiers, trained so long in neatness and self-restraint, became loose and disordered, with a wild and sudden persistency.

Almost all the soldiers were smoking. Almost all of them had overcoats thrown over their shoulders, which was not allowed by regulations except to cavalry soldiers. They wore their caps in every possible way except the regulation way, which was straight, with a little slant over the right eye.

The roar of the place was ominous. It lacked all rhythm. It was like the accumulation of a one-way current that had no way to discharge itself.

It was like an ocean wave suddenly stopped by a breakwater, hammering into the stone, trying to crush it and yet not able to pass.

Suddenly a soldier climbed up on the rostrum. From the waist up he was above the crowd, but that was probably not high enough. He said something and soldiers got chairs and planks and quickly he was standing above the heads of the rest of us.

He began to speak. At first you could not hear his words.

It made no difference to him. He waved his arms wildly to all four corners of the horizon. A grotesque figure—working with his mouth, head and hands, like a silent Punch-and-Judy puppet.

"Shut up!" "Silence!" "Revolutionary order!" "Preserve discipline, Comrades!"

Gradually the roar diminished, and we began to hear the speaker. He was the freshly appointed Political Army Commissioner of the district.

He was explaining what the abdication of the Emperor meant. He was explaining Order Number One, the first Order of the Provisional Government, the first thing done by Kerensky in office, the Order which gave political and mental freedom to the army under arms, in the face of the enemy. The Order which flattered the soldier and belittled the officer. It destroyed the army, released personal vengeance, began the civil war.

The intention of Order Number One was the same as that of the French Declaration of Human Rights. Mental freedom was good, political freedom splendid, peace was beautiful, but the immediate consequences of Order Number One were that soldiers shot and killed officers, military orders were ignored, the fighting army ceased to exist.

The Kerensky Government immediately issued amendments to the Order trying to cancel it, but it was too late.

That part of the Russian people which lost everything, may forgive the leaders of the Soviet Revolution, but will never forgive those who signed that hysterical, unwise and cowardly document.

A few years ago Kerensky was lecturing in New York. A woman came out of the audience bearing a bouquet of flowers. As she reached him she dropped the bouquet and slapped him hard in the face.

"For Order Number One," she said.

One slap in the face for hundreds and hundreds of martyred officers.

Now, the Political Army Commissioner was trying to explain this Order to the five thousand milling people in that barracks. Useless. They had explained it already to themselves in the only way they wanted to explain it.

"Down with the war and officers who make war."

The Commissioner's speech was long. Whenever he did not know what to say he shouted revolutionary slogans: "Long live the people!" "More power to the people!" "Down with the bourgeoisie!" "Down with the defenders of the old régime!"

The crowd would applaud and yell approval while the speaker gathered his thoughts. It was obvious that the Commissioner was of a very radical turn of mind. He was not only against the Emperor and aristocracy, he was also against the Provisional Government.

He was the first Communist I heard publicly. His interpretation of Order Number One made that Order a most handy weapon for the future triumph of his party. When that triumph came the Communists threw out Order Number One and replaced it with their own severe discipline. Meantime they were making as much use of it as possible.

"A soldier has equal citizen's rights with any officer." He read one of the first paragraphs of Order Number One, which he held in his hand.

And then he shouted: "Every soldier has a right to do anything he wants to do—as long as he is not on duty."

A roar of satisfaction.

Here was freedom.

Here was liberty.

To the tired, deprived, fight-weary men it meant that nobody could arrest a soldier, no matter what he did; no one could hold him for what he refused to do.

This was a time of war and war was a culture for the microbes of all vices. Now it was easy to disregard fences, to take, to steal, to kill.

The mob, getting drunk on the thought of the possibilities, was foreseeing the kind of freedom it would get.

"Down with the army," shouted the crowd.

"End the war."

"No more orders."

The Commissioner did not object—he went on: "Councils of soldiers will be established. They will have the right to check up on all military operations." Another uproar, wilder than before.

The soldiers had been made desperate by lack of ammunition; seemingly meaningless movements back and forth, which had perhaps been a part of strategy, they took for plain stupidity of the higher command. In this third year of war ninety per cent. of the army were laymen. It was always the officers who commanded attacks and ordered them to open fire. It was their commands which resulted in deaths, wounds and suffering.

"Down with them!" they shouted now.

"Let us control them. Let them tell us why we have to fight—to attack—to suffer."

The Commissioner picked that up. "Right, Comrades. Demand your rights. Now you can check up any order. You can ask, 'Do we really need to attack the Germans or the Austrians? Do we need to suffer and die? Must we make them suffer and die? Do we really want to—or is it only because somebody wants more decorations and advancement in rank?' "

The mob was in a delirium. Fists were shaking—curses were being spit out in hysterical hoarse whispers. Some tried to climb on the shoulders of others—to throw their threats into the far-away corners where the officers stood in a huddled mass.

The Commissioner was a demagogue of power and ability. When he finished the whole mass was in a frenzy. They applauded him and shouted for him.

The officers were silent and pale. Thirty-six hours before, at the dinner of the Cadet School, they themselves had

shouted with almost the same frenzy, "Long live the Emperor!" What shut their mouths now? What made them pale? It wasn't fear or cowardice—they had seen death many times. It wasn't lack of loyalty—afterward many of them died defending their chevrons from being torn away by "Calloused Hands."

It was the inexplicable silence of Revolution. The silence of a man in fever, which is more horrible than yells and shrieks in delirium. The silence when the body confers with the spirit before eternal separation.

After the Political Army Commissioner came the Commander of the Garrison. He was an elderly man who had been ordered to keep his post. Probably never before had he talked to that kind of audience. Trembling and shy, at the invitation of the Commissioner he announced that the whole garrison would have to take an official oath to the new government; the authorities had sent orders from Petersburg. He finished his speech, saluted and disappeared.

Nobody paid any attention to the old man. The mob didn't hear him. And they were not thinking much about any oath now.

A new figure appeared on the platform, a Major of Artillery, neatly dressed, without weapons, with a kind round face of the Slav type. His head was shaven, and he had a small blond beard which he touched with his fingers while he looked for words. Obviously a man of education with a fine personality. He spoke clearly:

"Don't lose your heads, soldiers. In times like these the best thing for each of you is to fulfil your duties in the most careful way and to wait for developments." A low murmur from the mob was his answer. A voice shouted:

"My duty is to take care of myself, you bloodsucker."

The Major turned his head and, suddenly going pale,

shouted: "I'm just as much a bloodsucker as you are—you knave."

Angry voices started to threaten. The Political Commissioner rose and lifted his hands: "Silence, Comrades. Let the representative of the bourgeoisie explain himself—revolutionary order, Comrades."

The Major again turned around.

"I'm not a representative of the bourgeoisie. I come from the people—and I've made my way to the place where I am to-day. I know you soldiers, and you know me. We've lived the same lives for four years, and I'm telling you. You are sensible people; you are marvelous soldiers. You'll do justice to the fate which is yours. Tremendous historical days are ahead of you; act carefully now, and you will hand down to posterity these days as a mighty achievement."

The crowd changed its attitude and began to listen more attentively. The firmness and the personality of the man took hold. His clear singing Moscow dialect had a soothing effect on the crowd. He was a fine example of a patriot. He spoke of Russia, and the honor of Russia, and of the honor of the army. To finish the war right now would be a black mark on that honor.

That was where he made his mistake. The mob would listen to talk about its greatness and about belonging to history, but the slightest word about continuing the war was met with fierce denial.

Single voices interfered in fast succession.

"That's officers' talk."

"Fight yourself, you son of a bitch."

"Want another cross? We will give you a wooden one."

"Down with the war!"

"White Hands!"

"Royalist!"

The Major argued: "From the moment the Emperor

made his abdication, I was a royalist no more. I have a free mind. I wish nothing but good for the army, for the navy, for the peasants and for the people. I care for nothing but the greatness and honor of Russia—Russia, which is yours now. Do you realize, soldiers, that Russia, our beloved Russia, is now yours!"

His emotion, on the verge of tears, got hold of the mass of boiling humanity. He was listened to once more. He continued his fight.

One man against five thousand.

He raised his hand and shouted, "Soldiers, I beg of you, I beseech you to continue to be what you have been until now. The heroic army of Russia—the faithful sons of a great country—that is now free, and yours for ever."

He was almost victorious. Another speaker like that and the soldiers could be handled.

Around the rostrum where the radicals were gathered, his speech and its effect met with no approval. There were voices of accusation and condemnation. When he came down a few officers rushed toward him, shaking his hands. The radicals used this as a sign of the speaker's real attitude. After all, he was a "bloody officer." The men dressed in civilians' clothes and a few women, obviously members of Socialistic organizations, these especially were growling and throwing abuse at him. They continued until the artillery officer disappeared among the other officers.

The next speaker climbed upon the platform. A Sergeant of Infantry, about forty-five years old, looking much like the Emperor Nicholas II himself, only much taller, six feet and two or three inches, broad in the shoulders. His chest was covered with all four grades of the Cross of St. George and many other military awards. He was very pale, and he started his speech with a sentence which I can hear right now.

I can hear his penetrating voice, used to command, in a peculiar slow rhythm which made it hang above all the other noises as an eagle hangs above the forest.

He said: "Officers and soldiers! I gave my oath of allegiance to his Imperial Majesty, Emperor Nicholas II of Russia. I have served him for the last thirty years, with my body, soul and mind. I won't be a renegade to my oath now." He paused, and then with force bent over the nearest heads and screamed:

"You are the scum—cowards—traitors. Irresponsible rebels who should be shot without trial. . . ."

Shrill exclamations ran through the crowd. The radicals were coming to their senses, jumping to their feet, trying to stop the speaker. They couldn't. The Sergeant kept on, like a wolf that is trying to break through a pack of hounds.

He had to answer accusations. He had to defend three hundred years of history. He had to justify every political oppression. He had to account for every man who had died in the war. He was doing it desperately, and when he couldn't find words, he yelled, "Scum—scum—cowards!"

The radicals acted all at once. From all corners of the hall they began to move down on the rostrum, just as hounds would move down-hill to the hold where a wolf had found refuge. You could see them making their way through the crowds. The crowd moved impatiently back and forth on their feet, now left, now right, as if looking for a direction in which to break loose.

A civilian who had been sitting in back of the rostrum jumped on it and, waving his hat in the air, shouted:

"Silence! Silence!"

He was a grotesque figure in an old-fashioned gray overcoat, a suit of English cut and pince-nez. His long crazy hair hung around his face. In one bony, long, red hand

he held his hat, in the other some papers, and he gesticulated with both of them, like a scarecrow being torn to pieces by a strong wind. He had no collar, and his open coat showed that his soft shirt had no buttons; now and then the whiteness of his body would show. With pelting speed, speech flew from his big mouth. His sentences were not more than three or four words. After each sentence he would wait and look at the crowd. If the crowd had not understood or had not heard he would repeat the sentence again and again.

The first of those sentences which entered into my mind was one which he had repeated in that way for many, many times.

"This man is a spy! This man is a spy! Spy! Spy! Spy!"

Then he continued, fast and hot, turning around as if on a pivot, to all corners of the hall. Again he repeated each sentence many times.

"The party has clear proofs! This man is a spy! He works for the police! In his regiment he served the police! He denounced every soldier who was not sold to the royalist idea! People have been arrested on his word! People have been sentenced to hard labor on his word! People have been sent to disciplinary battalions on his word! He is the kind of man who has made Russia suffer!"

His voice grew harder and harder, and now sure that the mob understood what he was saying, he turned to the Sergeant and shouted the same accusations at him—as if this were a private quarrel.

The Sergeant answered him, and I could hear the Sergeant shouting.

"Deserter! Deserter!"

Probably he meant that this man had been a soldier and had deserted; that he had been hidden away and had now

appeared in the open. In a hoarse voice, the civilian screamed:

"In the name of the Revolution, I demand the arrest of this man. I demand his trial. He is a murderer of liberty and the people!"

He raised his hand and grabbed the Sergeant by his epaulet. With one blow the Sergeant knocked him off the rostrum right into the hands of the crowd standing below. He was pushed back at once. Others started to climb up to get at the Sergeant. Still others attacked the Sergeant from behind. They threw him down into the crowd. He fell on their heads, still fighting and shouting. Below he was received by biting kicking madmen. Once he had strength enough to get up and strike left and right. All the time he yelled abuse. I heard his voice above the tumult. Once I saw his head.

Then he was standing on the ground with his back to the rostrum, defending himself against five thousand people pressing straight at him. Those nearest couldn't hit him, but they were tearing off his medals and rending his face with their nails and fists.

Those on the platform attacked him from above. Three men grabbed him by his shoulders and head and pulled him up again on the rostrum. He could no longer stand; he fell to his knees. His face showed white in spots under the blood.

He raised both arms and waved them aimlessly, as if forming the sign of the cross. He opened his mouth. The blood was coming out and you could clearly see how it was streaming down his lips. His face and lips were moving in an effort which should have produced a mighty amount of voice, but in the noise and uproar you could not hear a sound. Somebody from the back kicked him horribly. He fell down on his face. Two or three men rolled him to the

edge of the platform. Once more he disappeared on the floor. The fight was over.

And then the civilian speaker got himself in hand and went on with his speech. He himself had taken no part in the fight. And now he did not refer in any way to the man who had just been killed by five thousand people. It was like one part of a dream which ignores all that has gone before. He began to speak of the development of the Socialistic doctrine all over the world, and how it would prevent all future wars. He spoke about peace and paradise on earth.

I think it was this murder and this speech that made me a White.

Our regiment was by this time slowly and gradually congregating in one corner along the wall. The Colonel was talking to the lancers and to the officers, coolly and clearly.

"After all, we are Poles. This is a Russian affair. Why should we take part in it? Why should we be here? We gave our oath to the Emperor. He transmitted this empire to the temporary government and our duty is to obey its orders. That which is going on here can not be anybody's orders. I don't participate in it and declare that no lancer shall."

We all went from man to man and talked to them. We soon saw that we and our lancers understood each other.

"We are Poles and have nothing to do with that which is going on here," was their comment.

While we were holding our council something occurred that was not significant in itself, but it had an overwhelming influence on the minds of the lancers.

A woman speaker appeared on the platform.

Her voice, her dress, her Jewish accent, her nervousness and the monotonous shrill manner with which she delivered

a sort of ready-made speech,—all this was strange to us. To see a woman in such a place after all that had happened, was so unbelievable that it was like the injection of a strong drug.

The woman spoke mostly about the ruling classes of the former Russian Empire, and their representatives, the officers. And again why those officers wanted war and why the soldiers shouldn't want it. There was no bad name she did not call them. There was within her that kind of bitter hate which could grow only out of dreadful experience. She shouted how she had been tortured, how she had been beaten when arrested and exiled in 1905.

Her frenzied suffering, in sentences pronounced with stage-like pathos, was working like slow poison on the minds of the soldiers. I saw heads turning around and looking steadily toward the corner where the officers were. The woman called for the arrest of all of them, for the destruction of all of them. Otherwise the war would go on and on, and they all would be destroyed.

The infuriated men were getting new fuel; they were ready to go to another murder. Again, as before, the low swung heads started to shift to the left and to the right. Again the mob compressed itself more and more, trembling and moving in coils, like a serpent that plays every muscle without leaving its place. The officers in the corner stood with their eyes wide open, questioning themselves.

"Who's the next?"

The Jewish woman went on and on. Attention and her own influence over the crowd hypnotized her, and it seemed that nothing would stop her—not even another murder.

And then it happened.

Chmiel, our young cornet, made his way through ten yards of dense crowd, mostly our own lancers. In front of the Colonel, he clicked his heels, straightened himself,

saluted with full formality, and said: "Colonel, may I take command of my platoon?"

The Colonel shrugged his shoulders, "If you can take it, take it."

With that Chmiel drew out his saber and shouted at the top of his childish voice:

"Second Platoon, Polish Lancers, form to the right!"

And this was the first word that sounded like a breath of fresh air, like a drink of cold water when one is in a fever. In no time the lancers formed platoons, down the wall to the right of Chmiel. His command electrified all of us, and each officer of lancers went to his place and shouted the same command.

In a few seconds almost the whole regiment, with all the officers, was formed alongside the wall. The next command was given by the Colonel.

"Sabers out!"

Like one man the steel ribbon of two hundred and fifty sabers glittered in the air and rested on the shoulders.

"Form in threes to the left! Forward march!"

The regiment of Polish Lancers, step after step, clinking spurs and keeping time, started toward the exit.

We had to cross almost the entire length of the hall. We suddenly realized that the woman was no longer speaking, that we were surrounded by a dead silence. We saw all those massed heads turn toward us. We felt that if any one of us made one movement showing uneasiness or doubt the whole mob would rush in on us. But every head was up and every lancer was aware that he was saved only by his own poise and by his own steadiness. We were not molested.

At the door stood Major Bass. He had come to the barracks alone. He did not join the lancers during the meeting, and now he was not leaving the place with his regiment.

He had cast his die. He had taken the side of the Revolution. On our march we passed quite close to him. He stood rigid and pale. His watery blue eyes were piercing the face of every officer and every lancer. He did not blink once.

When his former squadron reached him, pain swept his face. He straightened up even more, and slowly raised his hand to his visor. The lancers were passing by as if not seeing him. He stood saluting to the end, until the last man marched out of the hall.

IX

NOT IN THE LINE OF DUTY

For a week after that meeting everybody seemed drunk on parliamentary procedure. Soldiers' meetings, officers' meetings, civilians' meetings, police meetings, cadets' meetings. We were invited to all of them. Clear sunny days made meetings and the exchange of visits easy. Our regiment had its own meetings too. We had to decide what to do. About fifty of our men had gone over to the radicals. One officer also had gone, the tall, blond, cold-eyed Major Bass. He became a member of the Council of Soldiers and Workers. There were about two hundred of us left.

We did not want to have anything to do with any change in Russia. We wanted to stick to our own formation and to work for the resurrection of the Polish state, which had been dead for one hundred and fifty years. The Colonel, like every Pole, never saw free Poland as an empire but as a republic. Centuries ago it had been the most independent country in the world. In the countries around, serfdom and slavery had existed. In Poland there had been economic dependence, but politically every man was free.

Thus the lancer did not feel toward his officer as he would have felt in a Russian regiment. Order Number One and all its freedoms did not make so much difference to him. And it was not difficult for the Colonel to take a sane democratic attitude toward the men, because he always had done so. He was a teacher by instinct and his way with the soldiers, after the shock of the first few days, was wise and definite. Once more he held his men in an iron grip as he

had done before. Our regiment, small as it was, was the only military unit which remained a military unit amid the panic and the bursting bubble of all earlier values.

The Russian army had suddenly become a political force. It discovered quickly that it was a governing power. It could not be bothered with military routine. That routine, which in time of peace had been busy and healthy, came to a stop. The horses of the neighboring artillery division stood for three days without being cleaned.

It seemed that the Political Commissioner had advised the soldiers to attend meetings where two wings of Socialists debated for hours on scholastic problems of sociology. The Commissioner decided that the Russian people needed enlightenment, political and historical. So, feverishly, he tried to enlighten his section of the army in a few days. By the talk of one meeting he expected to change a medieval sense of duty into an advanced democratic ideal of cooperation. He was one of many. Eight millions under arms were entirely in the hands of freshly appointed Political Commissioners.

At the same time no one had any real power. The men did what they liked best. An officer would say: "Clean your rifles to-day."

A Commissioner would say, "Meeting about Capitalism in the United States to-day."

Some men would go to the meeting, and some would simply lie lazily in their bunks. None would clean rifles.

For the first few days I felt myself completely lost. I did not know where to go, what to do, whom to ask, or what. Being young, every big change made an impression on me. I felt a certain exultation. But I could not yet identify myself with it. Neither could many others.

The poor Major of Artillery, the one who had made the speech at the meeting, wandered around like a beaten

dog, worrying only about his horses. A few days of chaos, stubborn resistance and mockery of everything that he considered order, threw him out of mental balance.

"Revolution is revolution, but horses don't participate in it, they remain horses," he was heard saying.

The whole world for him was now concentrated on the shining skin of horses. The horse belonged to the State, therefore the duty of every citizen was to keep it clean and healthy. It was public wealth. A couple of weeks ago this man had been sane. He had been a patriot. He cared about Russia. To-day his brain was possessed by a fixed idea. He became a miser. He cared about horses' skins—and nothing else.

Like a child, he was lost. He did not know what to do. By Order Number One, saluting was abolished. He would go along the street and he would meet dozens of soldiers. Now that every one could get out and go in as he liked, the streets were full of loafing soldiers, excited, talking, shrieking with laughter, eating in the streets, cracking sunflower seeds. Some of them would look insolently into the Major's face and ostentatiously put their hands into their pockets. With a pitiable effort he pretended not to see them. Or, a soldier with less spirit would look at the Major with a half guilty, sidewise glance. His hand would unconsciously jerk toward his cap and then he would pull the hand back, blush and finish the whole thing with a silly smile. The Major would make almost exactly the same foolish gestures, and like two children who are not on speaking terms, they would pass each other.

Once the Major entered our barracks and was greeted by a sentry who snapped smartly to attention. He stopped and stood a long time, as if not believing his eyes. He almost cried. Slowly he walked down the long line of the horses and the men who were inspecting equipment, and he

kept whispering something to himself with trembling lips and bent head.

He was probably remembering the time when before a parade inspection he always had put on white gloves. He had then stroked a horse and looked at the fingers of the glove. If there was the slightest trace of dirt on the snow white, the soldier would go on a week of extra duty. But it happened seldom—soldiers took pride in their horses. And now for four days the horses of his battery had gone without change of bedding.

He approached me with exaggerated politeness, answered my own and my orderly's greeting, and for a few minutes, tenderly and absently, kept patting my horse. Then he said: "Lovely horse! Lovely horse!"

I said: "Yes, Major."

He looked into my eyes, glanced around as if afraid some one would hear him, and whispered close into my face: "My horses are all ruined. They are all neglected. What are we coming to? What are we coming to?" He reminded me of a child whose doll had been thrown into the garbage.

One hundred and fifty million people were in rebellion. Thousands of leaders were tempting them with prophecies of the future, of new eras. And among them people like the Major wandered around and complained.

"Why does our every-day life stop?"

They were like a man, mortally ill, who, dying in bed, says: "That picture on the wall hangs crooked."

Beginning to feel that he was in familiar surroundings, though still confused, the Major said the words he had been saying for thirty years when pleased. He turned to the orderly, and, with the usual military intonation, snapped: "Well done, Lancer."

To which my orderly, with exactness, answered, also according to formula: "Happy to try, Major."

On which the Major, for no reason at all, took my hand, shook it a few times and said: "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you," endlessly.

He went to the Colonel as an old comrade to ask advice. "If only everybody would do his duty and then talk politics. I am ready to listen to anything they tell me must be done. But first I'd like to take care of my unit and keep it ready for service to my country. I can not do it any more. All my horses are ruined." In a dozen ways in his long talks with the Colonel he invariably would finish with this plea for horses. It was unbearable to see that intelligent, elderly man sobbing like a child. And because we were the only ones who listened to him he would come to us and spend his time in a familiar atmosphere, whenever he could. So did many other officers.

Among the ruling radicals this was considered as the first open sign that something was not right with the lancers. The political bosses of the garrison began to watch our regiment. One day an order came for the men of each regiment to elect a commissioner to represent them in their relations with their officers, and before the Councils. By an immense majority the lancers elected the Colonel.

The Council of Soldiers and Workmen could not understand this. All officers were considered enemies of the people. So they announced a special meeting with our regiment and they made it clear that only privates were to come. They thought the officers were influencing the lancers. Besides they were excited by the idea of creating an armed unit of Polish Communists who, going back to Poland, would spread radical ideas better than any civilian group. My orderly told me about the meeting.

First of all it began an hour and a half late, of itself an unheard-of thing in the army, where it was an every-day occurrence to be called at 12:57, or 10:14, or 23:06, and

where 12:57 did not mean 12:58. The Council was furious. And then only about half of the regiment slowly drifted in. A few men were sent to fetch the other half, but they refused to come. The delegates of the Council then went to the Colonel and accused him of frightening his men. On which the Colonel slammed the table and told the delegates that he had called his regiment this very morning at ten o'clock to announce that the meeting was for three and that every single man had been at his place and had heard the announcement. The rest did not concern him at all. It was their own business to go after the men.

He stood with his left hand on the guard of his saber, and in a loud voice, like an angry tutor speaking to misbehaving youngsters, threw short sentences at the delegates.

"You are in charge of political affairs. It is your job to handle them. The men are outside, go and get them. When I need them I do. And I succeed, otherwise I wouldn't be here. That is all." And he turned sharply and left the room.

The delegates, in a rage, went back to the meeting and started by abusing and scolding the lancers with all the insulting words in which the revolutionary dictionary was so rich.

"Your officers are fooling you, Comrades. Your indifference is the result of sabotage of those bloodsuckers, Comrades! That's what it is!" shouted one of them. "That Colonel of yours has a bunch of 'White-Hands' officers with him and he threatens you. You are afraid of him—of that fat pig—that helot of the bourgeoisie. Comrades, you are slaves—frightened slaves. . . ."

"Slaves," "frightened," "threatened," was poor policy with the Poles. For one hundred and fifty years they had been compelled to be slaves, they had been scolded for being born Poles, for speaking and praying in Polish, for calling

their country Poland. And now this fresh scolding—under the banner of Freedom—was too much for them. The whole meeting finished with an exciting exchange of bad names, the lancers having the advantage of a vocabulary in two languages, Polish and Russian. And, as my orderly put it: "Where they got all those words, Lieutenant—only the Mother of God can tell you."

In time all the Russians took the oath to the Provisional Government. The Poles did not. In a ceremony of their own, they christened a new standard for the regiment—a white eagle on an amaranthine field—for centuries the emblem of Poland.

But the exercises in our regiment had stopped for a while, and the Colonel took that time to learn still more about his men. He tried to teach them the ways of real democracy, and real communal justice. As if foreseeing what we had ahead of us, he did his best to look after the horses, after munitions and equipment. He even got reenforcements of about eighty men, Poles who had served in the artillery. From the reserve he got horses for them.

One afternoon the Colonel and a few other officers went for a ride. The fields about us, cold and stiff in winter, were covered with clover in the summer-time. It was a rich hay county. In one of these rolling snow-white fields we saw two enormous hay-stacks, big as three-story buildings, and turned and rode across to them. The Colonel took a handful of hay, smelled it, rubbed it in his hands and even chewed a stalk or two.

There under the brilliant sun, he gave us a short lecture on hay and horses. There had been a war, a revolution and days of hunger, yet this incident stays golden clear in my mind. There we sat on our strong horses, five of us, young and healthy, and listened. The Colonel talked to us in an even mellow voice, which blended itself with the warmth

of the sun and the grayish-green color of the hay-stacks. With his gloved hand he would now and then stroke his mustache, or play with the reins. His large, kind, brown eyes with little bags under them, like the eyes of a bulldog, wandered from one face to another, and with our young adoration we each tried to hold them as long as we could. But with his usual justice, the Colonel distributed evenly among us the favor of his attention. Nobody felt that he was forgotten—and that hidden sensitiveness of the Colonel made us love him even more than we did before. We admired his knowledge, we were moved by his love of his subject, and we laughed at his gentle humor. He told us how important it is to give horses the correct mixture. He compared timothy to meat in human diet, and clover to vegetables. The long fat grass of low countries and of lands flooded in the spring he compared to sweets, and he warned us not to give much of this to any mount.

"You don't feed people too much on sweets. And horses, gentlemen, are like children. They will always eat first that thick fat grass grown on rich flooded soil. But it's not good for them. If the horse works hard, give her more meat—that means more timothy and oats. If the horse rests, give her more clover, which means more vegetables. But not too much or the horse is apt to get cramps and gases. When it's cold give her corn. When it's hot spare her and don't be too lazy to dismount and wet her between the ears. She will reward you by serving faithfully. Love your horses, gentlemen, and they will reciprocate by sharing with you the numerous senses which they possess and use, which human beings do not have. Even if you are lost in a blizzard, let your reins loose; the horse will bring you to the nearest stable. While she is doing it she will give you her own inner warmth to prevent you from freezing.

"When you are suddenly afraid—even if you hide it as

a good lancer should, the horse will sense the microscopic faint odor of your fear—and use all her means either to agree with you and to save you from danger, or to snort at your foolishness and to calm you down by starting to nibble the grass around.

"The infantry says: 'It is the horse that carries those brave cavalry men to attack.' Yes, it is the horse, but only when the horse has grasped your will and your desire to advance to victory. Horses, high-blooded or common, are naturally born ladies and gentlemen, my boys, and you should never forget it. In speaking to them never omit the word 'Please.' I don't know a horse which ever resisted the word 'Please.' I can't say that about human beings. You know that old saying of Mohammed that all cavalrymen always approach a woman from the rear and a horse from the front. A horse likes square dealing, but a woman loves roundabout ways."

The country was in an uproar. About three or four miles away people were being killed because of differences in political opinion. After three years of fighting, there lay ahead of us still bigger catastrophes. But in that blinding snowy field with the sweet smell of dry hay and the Colonel's talk, all of it seemed like a dream, like the fall of a large ugly city in remote history. We were happy to listen to the old man who knew what he was talking about. The horses too stood quiet. And in their particular way they snorted as if they would confirm everything that the Colonel said.

On our way back, he repeated several times, "We must get some of that hay. We must get some."

We had plenty of hay for a month. But there were the eighty new lancers, and you didn't know what might happen to-morrow. The Colonel was a good boss. Next morning he called Major Raff and ordered him to go to the Quartermaster to get a requisition for as much hay as possible.

Major Raff had been wounded in the beginning of the war and had the bullet in his skull. It could not be taken out and was pressing on his brain. The doctors said that they could do nothing for him. It was death, or insanity, and they could not guess when either would occur. But Raff seemed normal except on days of blind mad headaches, when he would whine like a wounded dog and pour bucket after bucket of water over his head.

Now and then he would get an attack of cruelty. He would muster the lancers, and suddenly he would make them walk or run or get up and fall down in endless repetition until they were exhausted. He would stay in the center of the field, and with his skilled voice fire command after command, without stopping, for hours on end. If the lancers were being exercised with horses, he would make them jump over barriers in incessant circles until the beasts were covered with foam. He would make them dismount, take off the munitions, unsaddle the horses and then put everything back again meticulously in place. Three, or four, or five times they would do this, while he shrieked: "Faster. Faster. Faster." It was torture for the lancers, yet strange to say they always forgave him.

He never said a word of social talk. I think that in my year of close cooperation with him I heard not more than twenty sentences which were not in the direct line of duty. He went with pleasure on the errand for the hay. This was one of the soft days for him. He hadn't had his headache for a long time and he felt fine.

In the Quartermaster's office by this time was one of the most radical groups. Perhaps as a non-fighting unit it was filled with people who had opposed the war from the very beginning. Also there were those who had procured for themselves a safe place, and to protect their positions, they were more "red" than the Reds themselves. Perhaps it

was the policy of the Revolutionaries to concentrate on such vital centers.

Major Raff found that the old Quartermaster, whom he knew, had been arrested on suspicion of bribery and fraud. I do not know whether he was guilty or not. He had not made the boots with paper soles himself. He had fed the soldiers spoiled fish preserves, probably because he had got them that way. Maybe he had tried to make a little money on the side, but after all who hadn't, during the war? Anyhow, he was in jail.

His place was taken by a Lieutenant of Infantry, a dainty person with a small waxed mustache and slave bracelets on both wrists.

Major Raff had a hard time trying to reach this creature. He had to explain to several different people who he was and what he wanted. He had to sign, besides the legal requisition which he had brought, numerous inquiries and half a dozen statements. Almost half a day was taken up before he was ushered into the room. As these petty tricks of delay halted and tripped him, what heart-burning gall must have seethed in this man, already on the verge of insanity! The whole conduct was so different from anything that a military man would expect. The normal procedure required about ten minutes' time. You got a slip of paper and you gave a receipt.

The little Lieutenant was seated at a desk. He did not rise, but he did lift his hand in salute. And the slave bracelets rattled in Major Raff's brain. The door into the room was open, and beside it stood two armed guards. They could hear everything in the Quartermaster's office. He was proud of this arrangement—it was supposed to show that everything he did was so honest it could be done with open doors, before the guards.

The Lieutenant was of the infantry, and so he probably

did not like the cavalry Major. The cavalry was always smarter and better dressed, and the Lieutenant obviously liked to be smart. The Major rather despised infantry officers. But he had to stand respectfully, to be quiet and listen. He was usually quiet, so at first this was not so bad. The Lieutenant delivered a lengthy pseudo-political lecture to his solitary and fuming listener.

"We, the representatives of the people," he began. "We are watching those fat bourgeoise cows who are sucking the blood of the proletariat. We will put an end to their feasting on the fat of the land. . . ." And on and on in his treble voice, with little gestures and trying to be a great man, until finally he got up, slapped his chest and screamed: "No more tricks with the wealth of the people where I am involved."

He took an arrogant breath and opened his mouth to release more words, but the Major, each nerve shaking, pricked with a hundred tiny agonies, had listened as long as he could. With the peculiar quality of voice which was always the forerunner of one of his outbreaks, he half shouted, half screamed in dry military formula:

"Major Raff has the honor to present himself and ask for attention to the documents concerning the First Regiment of Polish Lancers."

The sound of this man's voice, when he was on the verge of his bursts of madness, was distinct and inhuman, as though some one were filing a glass plate with a steel file. It was like the high-pitched screech of some half-demon, half-animal being. Probably a wounded centaur would have shrieked that way. In those moments no one dared refuse to listen, no one dared to disobey him. When this centaur's command pierced high and feral, the platoon of lancers would exercise till half dead and fear to ask for recess. I remember once when I heard him in a room inside a house,

the windows vibrated, and that made his voice still higher and more cutting.

The Quartermaster probably realized that there was something wrong with the man and changed his tone. He asked him to sit down, which Major Raff did not do. But he turned around and shut the door, slamming it hard. It remained shut. Neither the Lieutenant nor the guards tried to open it. So they were alone together for about a quarter of an hour. It was probably a one-sided argument because Raff was never known to argue. But I presume the picture was like this. The Quartermaster refused to give him the requisition.

And once again Raff said the same official line, as before, without changing a word of it. The Lieutenant went on and on; maybe he intimated that the hay was needed for the personal use of the officers. And again Major Raff thundered his one official line.

What happened then no one knows. There was a long silence, and then the muffled voice of the Lieutenant, the noise of some sort of tussle. Again silence. The door flew open and Major Raff came out white as a sheet of paper, with the requisition in his hand, signed.

The Lieutenant shouted in almost a female voice, "Guards—come here—guards!"

The guards entered the room. The Lieutenant was standing in the corner and his face looked as if it had been slapped. The first two buttons on his uniform were torn.

He tried to explain something in a scared stuttering voice. "He . . . why . . . I'll complain . . . arrest him!" And he ran out of the room after Raff, but he was gone. Whether the Major had slapped him or had taken the requisition from him at the point of a gun no one ever knew.

Major Raff walked away from that building biting his lips. His expression was so terrible that people shoved left

and right to get away from him. He mounted his horse, and at reckless speed, he galloped through the length of the town. Straight through he flew—up this street—down that. When he came to a corner, he paid no attention till the last possible minute, then he swerved around in a sharp curve, lashing his horse desperately all the time with his stick. Pedestrians he did not see at all; they leaped wildly out of his way. Only the thunder of the oncoming hoofs warned them in time, or they would have been killed. He saw nothing. His bloodshot eyes stared out of his livid face and saw nothing. Sometimes they did not even look ahead, but stayed hidden under their lids. He rode like a ghost galvanized to fury. And cruelly, as a man whose heart is dead, he beat his horse.

He entered the Colonel's office, pale as we had never seen him before, saluted and, with his eyes half closed, handed the Colonel the requisition and the receipt from the Quartermaster.

The Colonel said: "Are you not well again? Better take a rest."

Major Raff answered in the same queer voice, but in a whispered tone: "At your service. Thank you, sir."

He tried to lift his eyelids, but as if they had no strength they dropped back again. And precisely, but very slowly, he turned about face, and walked out of the room.

His orderly told us that he came home, his lips all bitten and eyes still half-closed, took off his tunic and coat, poured a couple of buckets of ice-cold water over his head, and wiped his hands on a clean towel.

Then he sat at his desk and wrote a report. He called the orderly, gave him the report and told him to deliver it to the Colonel immediately.

The orderly said: "Major, the ice water is right here outside your room. I filled up a few buckets."

The Major answered: "I don't need them any more."

The orderly clicked his heels and started to walk off.

The Major said: "Wait."

He put his hand into his pocket, took out all the change he had, about a hundred rubles, gave them to the orderly, and said: "Don't lose them. And don't give them to anybody."

The orderly understood this to mean that he was to keep the money for the time being. He said: "Righto, sir," and went out. He delivered the message to the Colonel. The Colonel, while opening the envelope, asked the orderly, "Is he suffering very much?"

The orderly said: "No, sir, he didn't want any ice water."

The Colonel read the report and said quickly, rising, "Come with me. . . . Hurry."

A few of us followed him. When the Colonel entered the room the Major was lying on his cot covered with his overcoat, his left hand on his heart, the right one hanging down the side to the floor. His service gun lay next to his forehead, and there was not a drop of blood from the little black hole right in the center of the temple. His face was calm and beautiful. On his desk we found a little note written in pencil: "Please burn all my things."

The Colonel showed us the message which the orderly had delivered. It read: "Have the honor to report that Major Raff, Third Squadron, Polish Lancers, died at two o'clock on Tuesday, December the first, 1917, not in the line of duty."

X

A VIENNESE VIOLINIST

THE next morning I held in my hand that requisition for hay which had cost a man's life—a little piece of paper—a few tons of hay to keep some horses warm. I had to go on with Major Raff's job.

All the evening and most of the night Lieutenant Chmiel and I had talked about the suicide. And in the small hours of the morning I had rolled sleepless on my bed, thinking—for what did blind Fate save him when he was wounded? The bullet in his head—why hadn't it gone another quarter-inch and killed him? Would have been kind—that. Escaped to live a twilight life—between pain and madness—only half in the world about him. And now to correct Death's unfinished job, he had done it by his own hand. His memory became dear to me. He was the apotheosis of all the suffering about us. I waked early in the morning, with that eager nervous brightness that comes from lack of sleep and that slips into such heavy fatigue later in the day.

In the Colonel's office I saw that he too had spent a sleepless night. He was paler than usual and a little bent in the shoulders. He took the now famous requisition, wrote on it the name of some village, and said shortly, "Attend to it." I clicked my heels and went out.

The slip of paper lay heavy in my hand. I had to go into the country brooding with peasants. I had to take away from them something that they valued more than their lives—hay, the source of their livelihood. They might fight for

it; they might refuse to give it up. What did they care for any orders now? But orders were still orders to me. I had to bring that hay with me—at the price of lives—theirs or mine. Just as Raff had obtained the requisition.

In other times I should have enjoyed getting the hay. It would have been simply a pleasant picnic. But in the circumstances I was thoughtful.

On my way to the stables I met Chmiel. "It isn't going to be so easy," I said to him. "Whoever owns that hay isn't going to give it up. Not without a lot of trouble."

Immediately his face lighted up. "I'll go with you." He was a boy and this promised adventure. He had had all the rest he wanted. He was longing for a new attack or new march or new place—anything, to be in action. He fell into step with me.

"Father," he said, "I have an idea. Let's dress up for this. I don't know how long it is since I've had my parade uniform on."

"Don't be foolish, Chmiel." I played the serious elder. "Maybe we'll have to spend the night in a stable. Or a pig-sty. What in the name of Christ do you want to put on your uniform for?"

"Why not?" he insisted. "I'll bet you we find a nice good clean bed to sleep in. It will be made up by a nice little girl too—I assure you—and when she sees you in your breeches and tunic and amaranthine breast-piece, she'll make the softest bed you've ever laid your flesh on."

"How about yourself—you fresh rooster."

Chmiel laughed heartily. "I don't care—I'll have my bed, breeches or no breeches. Oh, come on, father—be a sport. We haven't turned ourselves out like that in God knows when. And only He knows when we'll have a chance to do it again. Maybe never, with all this rot going around." He tried to look gloomy but his face was not built for gloom.

His thirty-two teeth, shining like pearls, betrayed him.

I looked around me and saw the fresh clean white snow and the bright sun and the birches and the big pines, which were half white and half deep green, and the sky above, all so cheerful and so bright and so beautiful. Most of all I saw the sparkling big eyes of that youngster, romantic as the night and childish as a baby.

And I said, "Oh, to hell with you! Let's dress up."

I put on my dark blue tunic with amaranthine breast-piece and shiny buttons, and light blue breeches, and my cap with the bright red top and the white brim. In less than an hour we were ready. The orderlies too put on their colorful caps and were waiting for us with the horses.

Chmiel, smiling, debonair, dragging his saber, tall and erect as a young tree, ran down the steps of our house. His voice ringing with exuberant joy, he said the words that had been used in greeting for centuries by Polish cavalrymen, "God be with you, Sir Lancers."

To this the two orderlies in the same spirit answered, "For centuries and for ever, Sir Lieutenant." The trained horses also answered with nodding heads and a crunching sound of lips and nostrils. Each got a piece of sugar from me and from Chmiel. It was the custom in the cavalry before mounting a horse always to give her a little something. The horses knew it and were eager to get a rider on their backs. We mounted and started on our way, which we had studied out on the map.

My horse "Bell" and Chmiel's "Dawn" were in wonderful form. They had had a good rest. Their trot was the broad free step of horses which like to work and know how to work. They sensed that they were beginning a long run, and were wise enough to preserve their energy and keep an even pace. Those beasts were clever! When they were led out to the drill ground where the space was small and they

would have to run around and around for a couple of hours, they did not consider it fun at all. There was nothing to pretend to get frightened and excited about. So they always went slowly and heavily. Even a piece of sugar did not cheer them up. But to-day they knew a good two- or three-hour run was ahead of them. And by the sureness of their gait they tried to tell us that they were going to enjoy every mile of the going.

We passed a small town fast. Everybody stopped and turned around and looked at us. Most of the people we saw were soldiers, some of them clearly despising two officers and two orderlies, some of them admiring the good form of the horses, some of them not understanding where these dressed-up creatures came from or what they were trying to do. We were in neat and formal order. And nowadays nothing was supposed to be in its place and nothing was supposed to be in order. Every coat was unbuttoned and every cap sat on the back of the head. All hands were in pockets and nobody thought of saluting.

It didn't occur to me to pay much attention to all that. I didn't care whether a soldier saluted me or not. But Chmiel thought of himself not as Chmiel but as a uniform and a rank. Each time he failed to receive a salute when he expected one, he would curse under his breath, "Son of a bitch!—Red!—Rebel!" or something like that, and would cut the air with his riding stick so that the horse would prick up its ears and look at him with one eye as if to say, "What's the matter with you? I am going straight and nicely." And Chmiel, as if to apologize to the horse for his nervousness, would gently pat her on the neck and say, smiling, "Don't be frightened, Dawn. You're all right."

On the outskirts of the city we had to go through a drill ground for the infantry. Two companies were going through the routine of training with rifles and the move-

ments of an infantry advance. We slowed up and, instead of going around the field, we went straight across. We wanted to get a good look at the "dusty marchers." Neither Chmiel nor myself, nor even the orderlies, could help laughing. Each company had its officer with it, and with the officer stood a civilian political commissioner. Each of these was shrunken in a dilapidated civilian overcoat, a grotesque and pitiable figure uncomfortably squeezed into himself, trying to get warm. They did not understand what any of this drill was about. Each command the officer would have to explain to the commissioner. "This is necessary for such and such an action in the field." The commissioner's duty was to see that the officers did not use needless cruelty or stupidity in training the men. There was good reason, because sometimes the officers were cruel, especially to the new men, who often did not know which was left and which was right, and because everybody in every army tries to prove to his subordinates that "the army is not a garden tea party."

But the remedy which we saw now was ridiculous. The officer would give a command; the soldiers would execute it lazily. Once when he commanded them to shoot from the knee the platoon went very slowly down on one knee and some of them, like lovers or juveniles in a grotesque musical comedy, put their overcoats on the ground so that they could kneel more comfortably on them. It took a long time to explain that maneuver to the Commissioner.

We stopped and listened. The Commissioner inquired, "Why do you make them shoot from their knee? I understand that in modern warfare the soldiers fight from the trenches where they can stand. And in an advance they lie on the ground. Old hands tell me they never had a chance to shoot from the knee . . . it is unnecessary . . . it only tires the men. . . ."

In the meantime the soldiers were perched on one knee in the snow and they were getting impatient. Part of them stayed on both knees. Part sat down in the snow, and part of them got up. The officer started to explain: "Commissioner, the soldier ought to know how to handle the rifle under all conditions, and adjust himself to all protections which uneven ground presents. In the military school we . . ."

The Commissioner cut him off. "It is an old conservative point of view, Comrade Officer. . . ."

"But how about regulations?"

"Which is more important, the men or the regulations?"

"Men who know and stick to regulations."

"No. The men who have brains enough not to stick to foolish regulations."

Some of the men were still on their knees, waiting patiently for the end of the argument. Our horses got impatient too. Naïvely and openly as is the way of nature, they relieved themselves. They had had a hearty breakfast. Before I realized what was going on Chmiel approached the Political Commissioner. I caught mischief in my friend's eyes.

Very gravely he saluted and bending down said seriously, "Commissioner, I have the honor to call to your attention that our horses have misbehaved themselves and that it would be advisable not to let the precious infantry step into that mess." He pressed his spurs and galloped away. So did the rest of us.

Soon we were far out in the country. We passed hills and fields, streams and brooks, hamlets and settlements. The air was so clean and fresh that we almost ate it. We watched the little clouds of the horses' breath dissolving in fast movement and even their nothingness was joyful to us. When we met any one, we smiled at them and saluted with our sticks,

raising them to our visors. People would stop and follow us with their eyes. Against the background of white snow we probably looked to them like bright birds from a picture-book. I was not at all sorry that I had put on my uniform. Suddenly Chmiel slowed up his horse. We all did so. Ahead of us was a little farm-house with all the necessary buildings around it, and in front stood three young girls, chatting. We could not pass by without giving them a chance to admire our uniforms a little.

"God help," said Chmiel, smiling.

"We're not working—why should He help us," laughed the girls, "God help" being the customary greeting to one who is in the midst of work.

"Well, we might make you work."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't—we would run away from you."

"We would catch you—our horses are fast. . . ."

"You couldn't catch us in the house."

"You wouldn't throw us out of the house—it wouldn't be hospitable."

"No, we wouldn't throw you out but we wouldn't talk to you."

"I wouldn't ask you to talk to me."

"What would you ask?"

"Oh, maybe just a kiss."

"Then why go into the house?"

And the girls screamed, laughing at their own naughtiness.

Chmiel bent in the saddle toward the nicest black-eyed one.

"All right, let's have . . ." He didn't finish the sentence. Like scared squirrels the girls ran inside.

"Never talk to girls about kissing, Chmiel—just kiss them, take it from me."

"I don't care—there will be others. Let's go."

We started.

"Wait—wait," a high voice shouted suddenly. One of the girls was holding the door open and waving her hand. We turned back. All three of them came out again, carrying in their hands a pitcher of warm milk and a few pieces of cabbage pie. The black-eyed girl said:

"So that you won't think us inhospitable."

We dismounted and the four of us made a quick job of the milk and the pie. We shared with the orderlies everything but the dessert. And for dessert we got a couple of kisses from the girls. Ready to start again, Chmiel asked his black-eyed girl:

"Are you so nice to every stranger who passes by?"

"Oh, no. God forbid—but you are the first revolutionary soldiers who have passed us, and we couldn't resist being hospitable to you."

Chmiel of the "White Hands" raised his eyebrows.

"How do you know we're revolutionary soldiers?"

"What for would you wear the red cap if you weren't?"

It was my turn to laugh at Chmiel. Even the horses laughed at him. But I must confess that the loudest laugh was his own. Mile after mile he still was laughing.

We continued to go on at a swift pace. Crossing a small frozen river we entered a beautiful birch grove. The high wind whistled in the branches and the trunks moved and creaked almost as if they would talk to one another.

Suddenly we heard another kind of noise: the sharp and hollow blow of axes struck through the sound of songs. Many different songs they seemed with queer musical notions, sung in queer languages and resung by the echoes of the grove.

In the wide aisles of the white and fragile-looking grove before us a crowd of prisoners was cutting timber. Three ancient soldiers of the reserve were guarding three hundred

prisoners. Though mostly in Austrian uniforms they were Hungarians and Austrians, Tyroleans and Croats, and some few were Germans. The whole crowd looked healthy; they talked and sang and argued, all at the same time, excited by the political news which had reached them through the peasants. It was a little after midday and I asked Chmiel if he would like to stop here for an hour or so.

We dismounted. The orderlies tied the horses and unpacked their rations of hay, while we went deep into the snow among the trees and watched the prisoners work.

Close at hand, I saw the differing expressions on their faces. There were men here infinitely sad—men who loved freedom—who could not quite grasp the reality that they were prisoners. But there were men who were as free and happy as if they were birds. One short bowlegged Austrian was singing his head off with Tyrolean yodels. The venerable Russian soldiers, to whom the yodel was foreign and strange, roared with laughter so that they couldn't keep their rifles in their hands and dropped them in the snow. They acted like children at play; every five minutes the Austrian would sing two lines in German and then for a few seconds would yodel with the full strength of his lungs, and the soldiers would roar and roar again. I imagine they had been repeating this performance since early morning and probably would continue it after we left.

Then there was a third kind of men; men who tried to do their jobs in spite of everything, who tried to justify their existence in the face of all disaster. One man, a typical German country school-teacher with glasses and short beard, was lecturing a group of prisoners on forestry; telling them how the wood should be cut and chopped, and how to judge by its branches whether the trunk of a tree is healthy and firm. Last were a small minority of mean-looking people, gloomy, with shut lips. They worked like robots, mechan-

ically and with a grunt after each blow of the ax. They paid us no attention except to make a few mumbled remarks about our uniforms. As far as I could make out, these were sarcastic.

Near by a little field kitchen was working busily for the prisoners, boiling buckwheat porridge and some sort of stew with little meat but plenty of cabbage and potatoes. The cook, with only three fingers on each hand, was cutting bread with a sharp knife and at the same time he was watching the porridge and soup. I noticed he had only six fingers on both hands, because everything that he did was done with precision and exactness, as if he were playing a piano. He would mix the porridge and, taking a spoon in his left hand, would dip a little bit of the porridge out of the spoon with one finger and try it; then he would add either water or salt. With a definite rhythm he would go back to his bread-cutting which needed a knack because he had to give each man exactly a pound and a quarter of bread. He didn't bother to weigh the pieces of bread but knew exactly how much each would come to.

Pretty soon the guards began to look with anguish toward the big kettle. It was now two o'clock. At last the cook took a tin platter and beat it with a spoon, in the manner of a Chinese gong, and this little contraption made a most awful racket. Everybody stopped work slowly and with dignity. Many took snow and washed their faces and dried their hands under the armpits. With measured leisurely steps, realizing the full value of their half-hour rest, they marched to the kitchen. In the fresh frosty air they formed a long line in twos, and to each two went one gallon kettle of food.

Each had his own spoon, either in the top part of his boot or in a pocket. Mostly they were wooden ones, but here and there you saw a nice, clean silver spoon which

had probably been taken from home, and which was the only thing the prisoner had kept after fighting and falling into the hands of the enemy. He would take out the spoon gently and wash it carefully in the snow as though caressing it with his dirty black fingers. As he felt of that spoon probably his whole family appeared to him and the feeling of home wrapped him in a comfortable dream.

A few of the prisoners did not eat. They wandered around aimlessly, looking toward the road, until there came along a sleigh drawn by one horse, and carrying a few bags of grain. Two women were sitting on the sleigh.

A few minutes later, I saw walking along the road still more women (perhaps half a dozen of them), each one carrying a little bucket. They made their way straight to the men who had not eaten; these prisoners greeted the women nicely; some exchanged kisses. The buckets were opened, and here was a good lunch which the Russian peasant women had brought to their Austrian and Croatian and German prisoner friends. I wondered about it, and I talked to a few of them.

Some of these women were married, some not, but those who were married had not seen their husbands for four years. Maybe they were dead; maybe they were prisoners on the other side. The young men, healthy and so like the husbands who had gone away, were stationed in their houses. After a year or so they became like husband and wife, especially if the prisoner happened to be an orderly man and willingly took all the masculine part of the work around the house on himself. Sometimes there were people in the village who objected, but these were mostly priests or moralizing half-bourgeoisie. The simple people understood.

Sometimes it was the prisoners themselves who disapproved such arrangements. This was when they were pa-

triotic and still continued the war a thousand miles behind the front.

In many cases there were children of Russian women and enemy prisoners, and in many cases there had been children from the legitimate husband besides.

"What will happen in case he comes back? And what will happen if the other should have to go away?" the women asked themselves.

But so far life was fuller and the house was in better order, and one could even continue the simple production of grain and vegetables; one need not starve in the winter-time. And the children were born with the same pains, and their golden heads were just as dear as the other ones.

With one eye I was watching these people sitting on the trunks of the trees or on stumps in typical poses of field workers, the man sitting and eating comfortably and the woman standing in front of him and watching him eat, and sometimes eating herself, not speaking much but asking simple domestic questions, listening to the broken answers and to the words spoken in German, trying to understand them and looking exactly as everybody looks who is in love. It was shamefully decent.

As we were standing watching the prisoners at lunch we began to get a little hungry. We hadn't brought any food with us, and the pies of our revolutionary girl friends could not be counted as lunch. We glanced wistfully toward the kitchen. At that moment there turned from the stove six feet four of a musical-comedy Don Quixote. He started to walk toward us, holding high in both hands a hot kettle full of steaming soup; on top of that another smaller kettle of buckwheat porridge. In beautiful French he asked if we would like something to eat; he had brought soup for us.

He carried no insignia of rank. He was a private, if I am not mistaken, a volunteer, but his faultless French

startled us, and we both saluted, accepted the food and asked him to eat with us. We all three sat on an enormous flat tree-trunk. Our new friend went once more to the kitchen for two clean spoons and three pieces of bread, and we set in.

This is the story which he told us. He had been professor of violin in a Viennese conservatory. Before the war he had given concerts in Berlin, Vienna, Budapest, Paris, and he was now only twenty-six years old. A few months before the war, he had been married, and for Christmas of nineteen-fourteen he had come home on a three-day leave. The first day he found that his wife had been unfaithful to him. He had two days left, but he didn't want to spend them at home. He spent Christmas Eve and Christmas Day marching from one *Liqueur Stube* to another in Vienna, drinking himself almost to unconsciousness. In the last place somebody started to argue with him. Holding his glass in his hand, he struck the table or the wall (he did not remember which) ; the glass smashed and cut his hand. He showed us the scar. It was scarcely visible, but it had cut a tiny tendon in the forefinger, enough to destroy his ability to play the violin for ever.

He had gone straight back to his regiment, never wanting to go home again, never wanting to hear anything about his wife. He refused all leave, gave away his violin and tried to disappear from the face of the earth. One winter night he put on the white smock which was used to make the soldier invisible on snow, marched straight into the Russian lines and gave himself up. But first he took an identification plate from a corpse and threw away his own. Thus he himself would vanish and no one would ever know where he was or what he was.

I don't know why he told us his story. I suspect that it was the mildest and the most charming form of insanity.

Perhaps only a longing to unload to perfect strangers a painful secret of long standing. He did not tell it all at once, but gradually as he warmed up to our more or less cultured language and intelligent conversation. I tried to provoke him as much as I could with questions. He answered them willingly. For the first time in years he was talking to some one of his own standing. He was happy. He told us his fearful tragedy with a little wistful smile, without any indication of suffering or pain. And when at the end I asked him about music, he answered naïvely:

"Oh, the music is always with me, and I think as long as it is only for me I am a much better musician than I was before."

I asked him whether he needed any money or whether he would like to have something sent to him. With obvious sincerity he said no. Even Chmiel was touched by his serene attitude, and after we had shaken hands and given him our addresses to use in case he wanted anything, Chmiel became suddenly philosophical. "These people shouldn't go to war. They are not soldiers at all."

Lunch was over. All eight of us, including the horses, felt much better. We started on our way again. I thought, "Why did we spend a long hour with an enemy who gave us food, and much more than food, the story of his heart? And why did we feel so friendly and so warm? Aren't we supposed to be in a state of war with these people? And aren't we proved and pronounced enemies?"

As if answering my thoughts, Chmiel suddenly stopped his horse and said, "You know, I couldn't fight that Austrian—even to save my life. I'm telling you, I couldn't."

"Well?" I looked at him.

"Let's go," he cut in shortly and started off at a gallop.

We galloped in silence for a long time.

XI

TWIN BIRCHES

When, after another hour, we came to the village where we were to collect the hay, we stopped at its outskirts on the top of a hill and looked down. It was strangely empty. The only street was long and broad. A streak of dirty snow ran down the middle, where horses and sleighs had left their traces, and from each house a tiny path led into the filthy streak. Because all the roofs were covered with clean white snow you could scarcely distinguish the houses themselves from the surrounding fields. There was no smoke coming from the chimneys. With the sun shining in our eyes, we could not see anything except the streak in the middle of the road and the thin paths running from it. It looked like a huge dead centipede.

We knocked on the windows of the first house and tried to look in. It was too dark inside. I dismounted and entered. The large room was empty. Suddenly I heard a weak whining. I looked up. Two children were sitting like mice on top of the oven, looking at me with big scared blue eyes from behind mops of hair like flax stuck on wooden dolls. One of them was afraid of me and cried. As soon as I spoke they buried themselves under sheepskin coats and blankets. Only their dirty little bare feet stuck out with the big toe wiggling in excitement. I couldn't get a word out of them. I went out, and again we looked along the street. Not a soul. We walked across to the other side.

In the first house there was a senile half-bent figure of an old man who could not hear us, being deaf. He sat on a

milking stool in front of a tiny fire in an oven, and fed it with small twigs. He did not turn his head when we entered. When Chmiel touched his shoulders he looked up, pointed to his ears and mouth, shook his head and continued to watch his little fire as if the whole world were concentrated in those few jumping lazy tongues of flame. We decided to try the other end of the village.

It was about three-quarters of a mile long, and we met not one single person, not even a dog, through its whole length. We passed the last house and soon we saw stretching ahead to the right, a superb avenue of maples, gigantic, tragic in their efforts to hit the sky, swaying lightly with the wind and seeming to beckon clouds from the far-away horizon as one beckons a good friend from a distance. They must have been hundreds of years old.

For half a mile we rode down that ancient corridor, each tree with thousands of friendly arms spread in all directions, etching its outline against the white background, with the precision of an ancient master. Suddenly at the end of the silent vista we saw a crowd of people. We galloped up and popped into a circular piece of ground in front of a neat old house, obviously the mansion of an estate. It was a lovely house, two stories high with a large porch and columns made of wood, rather like a colonial house in the southern United States. Three steps led to a narrow terrace. Bright pots of geraniums looked out from behind the glass of some of its windows. Like everything else, the house was covered with a foot and a half of snow. Out of the white snow rose the white house, with a few bright red dots of geraniums like drops of blood on a white forehead, and the dark green pines leaning toward it as if supporting it and nursing it.

In front were two giant birches. Under them two tiny, slim women, looking exactly alike, were quarreling bitterly

with a crowd of peasants, many of whom held axes and saws. From our horses we could see them over the heads of the crowd.

One of the two wore a long black moiré skirt and an elbow-length knitted scarf, also black. Her hair was pure white, and on top of it was an old black lace cap. Everything about her was neat, and like something on a stage, carefully thought out. As she spoke in an angry voice, the little black cap kept jumping up and down on her head as if sharing her excitement. Around her parchment neck she wore a spotless white linen collar, and a thin black ribbon with a small gold medallion. Her hands were in home-made fingerless mittens and there were a few rings on her fingers.

The other woman was dressed the same way, only the colors were different. Her skirt, of the same sort of rich silk moiré, was a glorious dark red wine color. Her scarf was a bit longer and was dark blue. She had no mittens, but on her left hand was a small muff of black velvet, trimmed with white fur. Instead of a cap a great mass of white hair was coiled at the back of her neck. Clearly these two women were sisters and moreover twins, because if it had not been for the colors of the dresses I could not have told them apart.

Their faces were narrow, with high foreheads and beautifully shaped eyebrows, and no smooth spot appeared through their wrinkles. But they were healthy and even rugged. Their noses were fine, beak-like, sensitive, with fluttering nostrils. When they spoke you could see a row of white, regular, but small teeth between their colorless lips.

These two women, who were at least sixty years old, were giving a battle to several hundred furious peasants. We could not understand at first what it was all about. Everybody shouted and talked at once without listening to answers.

We spoke to a near-by peasant. He did not hear us. I moved my horse and touched his shoulder with my foot. The peasant turned his hairy face, covered with his frozen breath, and, looking up at us, continued his speech without changing his attitude or rhythm or intonations.

"I won't burn my barn, I won't burn it." He moved his arm up and down in a short chopping motion. "The kids are freezing, the calf is freezing, the chickens are freezing—the only wood I have is the barn. I won't burn it. I won't." And he swore with merciless and cruel Russian oaths, the age-long inheritance of the Tartars. Gradually we got the information out of him.

The village had always had a hard time getting enough fire-wood. Their forest was a small one and it was almost exhausted. They had to go far away, about ten or fifteen miles, to the government forest assigned to them, to get wood for their houses.

"And now," he said, "freedom has come, so we've told these two old bitches that we're going to cut down their trees—they have plenty. And they say we can't touch a twig of them. Throw them away . . . the lousy rats," he yelled over the heads, shaking his ax high in the air.

"They own the estate?" I asked.

"Yes," and pointed a red twisted finger toward the avenue of maples. "There is half a mile of good wood." He swung around and pointed with his other arm toward the two lofty birches which domineered above all else. Tall and lithe and flexible, they seemed to be ready to move in graceful ghostlike flow toward the avenue of black maples. A giant bride and groom ready to pass under the black swords of guards of honor, on their way to the cathedral. The peasant shook his ax toward them. "There are those two birches. Why should we freeze while these trees stand here doing nothing? Cut them down. Cut them down."

We dismounted, came closer to the two sisters. They were like two hares chased by dogs, finally cornered, backs to the wall. At the last moment when the dogs are about to leap and kill, the hare gives a sort of scream, the only sound he ever produces and leaps straight at the dog without any hope or any means of fighting.

They were like wrens in a tree-top nest, when a hawk descends: the tiny things will fly at the huge bird and attack.

They were talking fast, nervously chewing their lips between words—both together. They called each peasant by his first name. There was no doubt but that they had all known one another from childhood.

We listened to their words. They didn't know anything about freedom. They didn't want to know anything about it. Every year they allowed the peasants to get all the dead wood from their forest. They'd done it this year too, but that is all they could do.

"We don't want your forest, it's too far away. It's as far as the government forest." Different voices shouted around, "We want the birches—these birches right here." As if understanding, the birches suddenly swayed and shook, and the wind cutting through their branches, whined and sang sadly. The two old women leaned closely against the white bark. "No, no," pleaded one. "God Almighty, no."

"No," begged the other, and then picked out a man who looked even older than themselves. She took three or four short steps right into the middle of the crowd, and grasping the old man by the lapel of his coat, dragged him back to the tree, saying all the time, "No . . . no . . . no. . . ." And looking straight into his old eyes. Then she turned him around to face the others and still holding his lapel, divided her words between him and them.

"Artem knows when those birches were planted. Don't you, Artem? You were here. On the wedding-day of our—

God rest their souls—father and mother. How could you cut them? Tell them, Artem. You know that they are holy trees to us. Every anniversary of their blessed memory you used to come and pray with us right here under these birches. How can they cut them—tell them, Artem."

The two women did not sob. Their voices were old and tired, but dignified and firm. From their tarnished light-blue eyes tears were flowing slowly, as if stumbling over each wrinkle, as if hesitating to leave their faces. The other sister raised her voice.

"We are the last ones of our family—the last ones," she repeated. "You'll bury us right under these birches, but do us a favor. Please, for the sake of Jesus Christ, don't cut these birches down before we die."

Some of the children in the crowd started to cry aloud, and two or three with whooping-cough were writhing in the agony of a severe attack. They had probably been here for a couple of hours. Perhaps they were hungry, and surely they were cold. They looked pitiable. And their sufferings infuriated the mothers. Their voices became louder and more hysterical. Clutching their children to their breasts, they threw harsh and reckless accusations at the two sisters, who themselves were clutching the two tree-trunks and shouting answers and abuse.

The men suddenly gave way to the women and became much milder and quieter. They tried to explain to the two sisters that there were so few of them now and so few horses left that it was a heavy task to bring wood from so far away, and they too called the ancient Artem as their witness.

The women began to grab the axes and saws from the men. And it was the women who were nudging the peasants, urging them not to listen to the two old ladies. "Cut the trees right now," they cried in their strident voices, "and talk it over afterward."

I asked myself, "What shall I do?" Here were these two Dickens-like figures, as if chiseled out of ivory, their faces like old cameos with the inherited strength of generations, with the power of tradition, and the dignity of leaders. They were as courageous as the most adventurous heroes of the war. The number of their adversaries did not frighten them. The axes meant nothing to them, unless they should be plunged into the white bark of the "Holy birches." They showed no fear of the furious faces that stuck toward them like spitting wildcats. Legally speaking, they were in the right.

But these other women, what of them? Women who were exhausted by hard work, not only the work which they had always done, but that which their husbands and brothers and sons had done before the war. Women who were exasperated to nervous fatigue with the crying children in their arms. Women who got up every day at four o'clock in the morning and went to bed at ten or eleven at night. Every day, day after day, getting a chance to sit down only when they ate their scrappy meals. Women who had to keep a fire going in their stoves all day long if they did not want to freeze. Who had to bring their wood from a distance, often on their own backs. Women whose feet always hurt, whose heads always ached. They nudged the men, they grabbed the axes. Their mouths were screwed up to one side, the last drop of their patience was spent.

And the twin birches, the third party in the argument, two more thoroughbreds like the two sisters, aristocratic specimens, unique and beautiful, rose high above the house, and I am sure that in summer their shadow covered the whole front of it. Huge they stood and old, twin sisters too.

But while I was thinking Chmiel acted. He raised his stick, moved quickly in front of the two old ladies, and turning his horse, shouted in his young cocky voice.

"Get out of here! Out of here—you rebels! Red scum—lousy rats! Don't one of you dare to touch anything that doesn't belong to you. Just try, and I'll shoot you right on the spot! Out of here, all of you!" He stepped into the crowd and took hold of the whole situation immediately.

The people, accustomed for centuries to submitting to uniforms, did not for a moment think that they might disobey a man with glittering silver epaulets on his shoulders. The women fell silent and even the children stopped crying. Chmiel had sense enough to wind up his yelling and shouting with the assurance that he himself would talk to the owners, and that he would ask them to do what was best. He promised that if they would behave their demands would be justly satisfied. He had no right whatever, legally or morally, to make any such promises. As a soldier it was his duty to defend any civilian who was in danger of being attacked, but it was not in his orders to appear as a judge in a situation like this. After all, it was just as well that he did, otherwise there would have been murder. I took his cue and made my way into the midst of the crowd.

I asked the peasants to tell me how much they wanted, what amount of wood would satisfy them until the end of winter. I was immediately surrounded by haggard tired faces, by eager eyes and clumsy hands moving in an effort to make the words more expressive. All together, each started to tell me how much he or she would need until the end of the winter, and how long the winter would be and how severe the winters were. Because of our uniforms, they took us for powerful judges, and they demanded immediate justice. Each one of them, it was clear, was trying to express his personal needs and the personal disaster which he had encountered for years and years, and for which he now wanted to be repaid in one day.

It was the same thing as in the regiments. These peasants

were drunk with only a hint of freedom, and they wanted to be repaid for all their years of suffering. There was no thought of organization or cooperation, not a hint of any legal procedure. There was nothing which could be defined by the word "rights." There was only one intense objective in the yells:

"We must have it right now!"

"Right now. . . ."

"Freedom has come."

"Give it to us right now!"

I pretended that I would figure out how much they needed of everything, because in their words I could now hear not only demands for wood, but demands for flour and for grain, and for everything they could think of.

The thought flashed through my mind that our red headgear played an important part in this almost tragic scene, as it had played its part in the more pleasant incident with the girls on the same day. Because our caps were red we probably were considered as "Reds of the people." And the peasants trusted our words and calmed down. All of it was as naïve as a little fire started in a forest by small boys playing at Indians. It might be just a game, yet the fire could turn into a blaze which would spread ruin for miles around.

Meantime Chmiel assured the two sisters that they could return to the house and that everything would be in order. We told the peasants to come back the next morning to that same place and we would satisfy them. They thanked us and praised us, and in a second they turned into a pleasant mild crowd, ready to wait overnight and to be happy over that night, even in the bitter cold huts, just because some one had promised them some sort of solution in the morning.

The two sisters also thanked us heartily, and began to

talk to the peasants at once in a different voice. The peasants responded at once, their tones quieted, and became patient again. Soon everything was peaceful, and we were invited into the house itself, while the crowd went slowly back to the village.

XII

PRESERVES

On the terrace the two sisters asked us, as if apologizing, to clean our boots on the worn-out scraper and mat. One of them turned and gave orders to the orderlies to take the horses into the stable and to come to the back door where she would give them oats. They would find the hay in the loft of the stable.

We entered the house. Taken exactly as it was, it would have made a perfect museum. From the hall with its dark mahogany hand-carved chairs placed in stately rows along all four walls, there were doors to the left and to the right and a stairway to the second floor.

The doors were open and involuntarily I stopped and looked into a large reception-room about sixty feet long and forty feet wide, furnished splendidly with a set of furniture made by hand of Karelia birch. Fifty pieces there were, couches, love-seats, big formal sofas, rows of chairs along the walls, armchairs around the fireplace, all solid, harmonious and comfortable. The wood was carved and polished in the exquisite manner of hand-made things, mellow, and warm to the touch. The covering fabric was a thick black silk brocade with broad stripes six inches wide; the stripes were woven with vivid green, red and white flowers. Pictures of unquestionable value looked down from the walls. In the four corners stood cabinets with porcelain and china, which as far as I could see, held not a single object which was not a collector's piece. A hand-made hooked rug of pale green with pink roses covered almost the whole room.

I looked to the left into the dining hall which was about half the size of the living-room. The ceiling was a little lower and the whole effect was rather gloomy. All the panels, the floor, the sideboards and the tremendous chairs were made of mahogany that was almost black. An old-fashioned credence occupied almost the whole wall opposite the door. The chairs with high backs stood stiffly around the table and looked stern, as if they were the dead guards of a past glory.

In this room, in the hall and in the living-room the temperature was freezing. It was obvious that no one lived here.

And now we noticed a modest door under the stairway. One sister opened it and led us into an apartment which had obviously been servants' quarters, or perhaps a nursery, in the old days. There were three small rooms with a large kitchen at the end. It was much warmer in these three rooms. They had small windows, with the red geraniums which we had seen from the outside. Other little pots of flowers, many of them, stood behind the delicate hand-made lace curtains, cream colored, yellowish with age, but like everything else in the room, immaculate. We entered, took our caps off and stood waiting as if at a formal reception. The atmosphere of the place made us feel that way. The two sisters left for a few seconds, and then returned, approached us formally and introduced themselves. The one in black was Elizabeth Sorin and the one in colors was Mary Sorin. Elizabeth went on to explain about the warm little apartment.

"Times are so bad," she said in a high well-bred voice, "we can not afford any help. We have to take care of the whole house ourselves. So we live in these three tiny rooms."

"It is really comfortable," Mary interrupted mildly. "You see how warm it is. We sleep, Betsy and I, in one

room. This is the dining-room. And there beyond is a reception-room. To-day it shall be a guest room," she smiled graciously at us.

We clicked our heels. One would think that little old Mary was a queen offering us the freedom of her kingdom.

Betsy continued her sister's speech with ease. "We've done everything ourselves—for almost a year now. We learned quickly and now we enjoy it. . . . Mary even scrubs the floor." And they both laughed good-naturedly.

Mary, as if proud of her sister's approval, added: "Oh, nothing to complain about—nothing to complain about. We get along very well. We have a small lame orphan girl who helps us a little. Serves at the table. Her father was killed during the war. She was alone so we took her. She sleeps in the kitchen. But she doesn't know how to scrub the floor. I do." And again they laughed heartily. "So we get along very well."

The furniture had obviously been taken from all over the house, each piece chosen because it was comfortable or beloved. It was of different styles, but most of it was covered either with horsehair or with needle-point embroidery, in colors still brilliant but mellowed by time. The chairs had little pieces of lace for head-rests and on the arms. It was getting dark and Betsy lighted a few candles which gleamed in beautiful hammered silver candlesticks. In vain I looked over the whole room for some object at least fifty or seventy-five years of age. Everything was much older than that.

Mary said, "Well, Betsy, since we have two such nice-looking boys as guests, don't you think we ought to put on the holiday lights, so that they can see how nice we look too?"

"Yes, yes, Mary," answered the other. "It is really like a holiday."

She went into the kitchen, and in about ten minutes returned bearing a most complicated piece of machinery. On top of it sat an opal-colored round glass, painted with little fat flying cupids, and pigeons holding flowers in their mouths. The lower part was a group of contorted bodies of mythical bronze animals, holding a shiny brass bowl on their horns.

It was only an oil lamp, probably one of the first luxurious models ever made. It had about twenty different gadgets, and it gave about as much light as three candles. That lamp went into the middle of the table.

"Sit down," said Mary, "while I go and see about the oats for the horses."

"Yes," said Elizabeth, "sit down and enjoy yourselves while I go and see about supper."

With curtsies they both disappeared and we were left alone. We took off our sabers, put them in a corner and started to look around the walls which were covered with photographs, daguerreotypes and bad oil portraits of ancient, old and young ladies and gentlemen. We noticed that there were a few grand dukes and duchesses with personal inscriptions, and a portrait of the late Emperor Alexander III, also signed. A few of the photographs were recent,—of boys in military uniforms, of volunteers and officers, and among them, four or five were circled with black crape and had little bunches of dried-out flowers stuck behind the frames.

Chmiel sat in the corner of a couch and lighted a cigarette. "It must be awfully thrilling and nice to have a home like this," he said. "You know I've never had a home. Even when I was at the cadet school I used to go to the homes of the other boys on Sundays and Christmas and Easter. When one has a home like this, he still lives in it even after he is dead."

I did not answer because my eye had been caught by a slight movement at the kitchen door. In a moment it opened cautiously, and a little figure tried to squeeze itself unobtrusively into the room. It was a little girl of thirteen in an old but clean gingham dress about six sizes too large for her. Underneath showed big felt half boots, and on top blonde colorless hair, smeared with oil and brushed till it lay flat as skin upon her head. A little frivolous pigtail hung down in the back, courageously tied with a piece of bright red rag. First she stood and looked at us with unbelievable admiration. Then when she saw that we both had stopped talking and were watching her, she choked a bit of a smile and, looking down, timidly limped across the room and stopped at the other door. We followed her with our eyes, and glancing back, she took her right hand from under her apron, and with a little red childish finger, mischievously beckoned us to follow her. Not understanding what all this was about, we did so. The girl, as though playing hide-and-seek with us, crossed the next room almost running, opened the farther door, went through it, stuck her head back again from behind the door, and with the same finger, once more invited us to follow her. She looked secretive and sly. We were quite mystified by now and followed her fast, intending to grab her by her pigtail and make her tell what this game was. But there she was, in a cold small hall or anteroom all painted white, and standing in front of another inconspicuous door.

When we were about three steps away from her, she suddenly opened the small door behind her, and with the manner of Houdini finishing a trick, pointed to the room behind that door, sputtered with laughter behind her hand and, like a little lame duck, ran outside.

We looked through the door. It was one of those small, now and then handy necessities which every house contains.

After all, the charmingly modest sisters had found an indirect way to tell us where we could make ourselves comfortable. We washed and cleaned ourselves a little and came back into the dining-room.

On a small table was a clean white cloth and four places set with excellent china, crystal and silver. We waited. Suddenly the door opened and Mary and Elizabeth, all dressed up in lovely black evening dresses, appeared. Mary wore a little white apron over her dress, and both had changed to white mittens. They started with apologies for everything that was about to be served.

We sat at the table and talked about this or that picture of an officer on the wall, whose uniform we recognized. Betsy, with a little shade of sorrow, started to name them to us. The largest two with the black crape were photographs of their brother and nephew. They explained that since the beginning of the war they had lost both of them—the only two male members of the family.

Their brother, who had been a general, had been killed at the very beginning of the war during the first raid in East Prussia, and their nephew, who had been a young cornet in a Cuirassiers Regiment, had died in the same offensive. Since then they had had to take care of the whole estate, and times were getting worse and worse. They had inherited a little money invested in something or other, but with the war they had lost that too. All they had in the world was their estate and this house. They had no more close relatives, nobody else in the world. But they were cheerful little souls. With tears in their eyes, but proudly, they talked about their brother, the General, and their nephew, Nicky, who had undoubtedly been the love and pride of their lives.

The sisters addressed each other now and then in perfect English and they always called each other in English "Mary"

and "Betsy." They were undoubtedly well educated, and brought up with a sort of splendid Victorian pedantry, as was almost all Russian nobility of that age.

While we were talking, Mary was going back and forth to the kitchen and each time she brought back a plate with a new delicacy, obviously home-made. When the table was almost covered with dishes holding countless good things to eat, the little lame girl appeared with a steaming samovar.

We appreciated it because in spite of the assurances of Mary and Betsy that it was warm in the room, the boiling samovar was the only source of warmth. Outside was good strong freezing weather, and indoors it was uncomfortably chilly.

We began to eat and to drink hot tea, and the conversation turned naturally toward the peasants' demands and the new political situation. The sisters told us that they never had had any trouble before, that the old General was loved by the peasants; he had given a school building and he had supported the school until just two months before the war, when the government took it over. He had donated the building and the land. He had also built a little hospital and at his expense it was carried on until taken over by the Red Cross during the war. He had planned to give a library to the peasants, but the war interrupted. He had been a total abstainer, and his only troubles with the peasants had risen when he saw one of them drunk or buying liquor. When the estate was going full force, he had never introduced any improvement in technique without letting the peasants benefit from it. Whenever one of them wanted horses they could always borrow them from him. In the two sisters' description the past was like a wonderful idyl. War came. Money gone. Horses taken. Men died. Left were memories and a half-frozen existence, under almost the same conditions as the peasants in the village.

We used to receive horses for our regiment from the reserve, and once we got a pack of English thoroughbreds. They were placed in dirty and drafty war-time stables next to common and gloomy old-timers who had already gone through many months of war. The thoroughbreds were tired to stupefaction, but they would not lie down without bedding nor dirty themselves in their own manure. They would not eat soiled or mildewed hay. They stood upright all night, and did not touch dirty food. The common horses would drop for an hour anywhere and would eat anything. Wet or dirty they wanted to exist. The thoroughbreds preferred to perish but to hold up their standards. The two sisters, too, were perishing, holding up their standards.

"Now comes this freedom. What is it all about?" asked the sisters. They had no newspapers. They learned first from the peasants. They learned because the peasants attacked them. There was no one even to send to town for help, and no telephones. Two little wrens, they found themselves surrounded by hawks and their wings were broken. But they stood upright and fought back without weapons. We were the first people of their class in almost a year to whom they could talk freely, from whom they could get some intelligence about what was going on in the world.

The Emperor was their first question. We told them. The old girls stood up, crossed themselves and said, "God bless him. He knows what is best." Then they sat down and lowered their eyes. Silence fell, disturbed only by the humming of the samovar and the howling of the wind outside.

Mary was the first one to break it. Her eyes still sad and her head shaking slightly, she looked at us and tried to smile. It took her some time to master it. When she did she was a charming hostess again.

"I am going to give you something you will enjoy, young men."

She went out and came back with two silver bowls, one of sweet pickled apricots and one of brandied cherries. "Eat those!" she said simply.

Betsy did not recover so quickly. Looking away into the darkness of the window, she whispered, "Tell us more."

We told them all we knew. About the meetings, about the decay of the army, about the suicides and Order Number One. The sisters listened, and the moment we stopped to take a breath, Mary would walk on her toes, trying not to lose a word, out into the kitchen and bring us new plates with new delicacies.

By ten o'clock there were about a dozen dishes on the table, each one filled with a different kind of preserve or pickle or sweets, all home-made. Nuts, watermelon rind, sugared plums, apricots soaked in cherry brandy and after that dried and covered with powdered sugar, almonds, and small cookies full of fruit, and many kinds of jellies and jams. When finally I asked her why and how they had so many different and delicious things, their faces beamed and they said:

"Come on, dears, we will show you our pride."

They led us into the kitchen and from there to a cold-storage room about twelve by fourteen feet, all four of its walls covered with shelves. There were no windows, except a ventilator in the ceiling, and by the glimmering light of two candles, I looked on endless rows of glass jars of all possible colors and substances with dozens and dozens of different good things to eat. They took us all around the room, holding the candles high, and naming each thing as we passed the neat colorful rows.

"This is what we did all his life for darling little Nicky," they both chattered excitedly. "He loved these things so

much. When he came home for the summer from the cadet school, nothing would be left of all these preserves. In the fall we would make new ones for the next summer. Now he is dead and what shall we do? We don't know. There's nobody any more to make the preserves for."

We went back to the dining-room. The little lame girl, sleepy by now, and awkward, was tidying up the table, and placing new clean dishes in front of our two seats. "Now we will sit down to supper," said Elizabeth.

Though Chmiel and I were considered the two champion eaters of the regiment, we were almost prostrated by the idea of another batch of food. But here it was coming, a little bit of pepper brandy in a marvelous light-blue Venetian glass carafe, bacon covered with paprika and smoked on Juniper leaves, and hot chopped mushrooms with sour cream gravy and hot bread and fresh butter and again tea and again preserves. During the meal Mary said to the little girl, "Irina, bring your plate."

Irina brought her plate and Mary gave her a little of everything. Then the little girl held out a big cup with a little chip and got hot tea and plenty of sweets. Elizabeth told her to eat quickly and to arrange the beds for the young gentlemen in the first room.

Supper over, we were worn out. We got up, thanked our hostesses and asked permission to retire. Elizabeth said quickly, "Wait a moment—I'll just see if everything is in order." We chatted with Mary while she started to clear the table. Elizabeth came back. "Everything is ready. You can go and rest."

We went into what might be called their reception-room which was the first room in the suite. One bed was arranged on a couch and another was made up of two large chairs with a little old-fashioned trunk between them, all covered with a soft feather-bed. Everything was clean and sharply

white and starched, with a little odor of camphor wood and lavender. Between the beds stood a nice small table covered with a white napkin, on it a carafe of water and again about six varieties of preserves.

We said good night, and the two old ladies gently curtsied, hoped we would sleep well and, softly closing the door, smilingly disappeared like two Victorian fairies.

XIII

THE ARCHANGEL GABRIEL

We undressed quickly and got into bed. Through slits in the shutters the moon shone now and then when it could fight its way through the racing clouds. Dogs barked and howled. You could hear the snow, hard as sand, hitting the shutters; you could hear it as it struck against the walls and the trees. It was the beginning of a blizzard.

I could not sleep. I stretched full length, trying to relax, beginning with my toes and fingers, which some one had told me was a sure remedy for insomnia. But before the movement had reached my thumping heart, I was again tossing and twitching. I turned restlessly in the sheets, moving as quietly as I could. Soon I heard Chmiel also moving stealthily in his bed. I heard him lighting a cigarette. Relieved, I sat up and lighted my pipe.

"What are you thinking about?" I asked him.

"I can't sleep," he said, with a sigh of relief. And I could hear him thumping his pillows so he could lean against them, sitting up. "I wish we hadn't come here."

"Yes," I said. "The weather is pretty bad."

"No," he said, his voice a little offended. "Not that. It isn't this blizzard. You ought to know that doesn't mean much to me. I've slept in worse storms, and in damn sight worse places. But these peasants—and these two old women—they're having such an awful time."

This sudden burst of philosophy came strangely from Chmiel, and he spoke a little self-consciously. He had always seemed to me the complete soldier. He loved war

more than anything in the world. He knew little else. And now, probably for the first time in his life he was thinking about war as something divorced from soldiers—about what war meant to the rest of the population. I had never heard him say anything of this sort before and I listened in growing amazement.

"We shouldn't have come here. We shouldn't have spoken to these people. I wish I hadn't talked to those peasants. It disturbs me in my job as a soldier. When I was in the trenches I thought I was defending the home fires, and that they were peaceful and comfortable and plenty. That gave me strength. That was why I thought that the greatest thing a man could achieve was to be a soldier, to be a defender of his country. But look here. After all I've been through, I've never suffered one hundredth part of what these people in the village and these two poor desolate old women are suffering. I always had plenty to eat and a place to sleep. If sometimes I was wet and cold, even that's a sort of pleasure if you're young. I've happened not to be wounded and I haven't died yet. And now I have a feeling that my comfort during the war was given to me at the price of the comfort of these people."

I had been watching the light of his cigarette. That and the tiny glow of my pipe were the only things visible in the room. Then suddenly the moon shone through the shutters for a moment and I saw that his elbows were clasped around his knees, the cigarette hanging from a corner of his mouth. He grew suddenly silent when he was revealed by the light. But the moon went and the darkness released him once more. I have wondered since whether the narrow dark of the room and the invisible me did not take him back to boyhood confessionals, and whether the unconscious infantile impulse so aroused caused him to speak so freely, and to confess the state of his soul.

The moon departing, once more drew a curtain between us. And Chmiel's voice went on.

"The Germans are our enemies. And I've accepted them as such. But I've seen them only as the same military organization as my own. I suppose it's queer, but I've loved Germans as individuals. Such fine enemies. No man can fight nobly or with full force unless he loves and respects his enemy."

I lighted my pipe again, and said nothing.

"I don't know what I'd do," he went on, "if I were ordered to attack those peasants. It must be the most horrible thing that could happen to a soldier. This unorganized, howling crowd of revolutionary peasants, spitting hate! Abominable! I couldn't lift my hand to hit them. I couldn't allow them to kill me. If I were given orders I'd have to obey them though. . . ."

For a few moments the clatter of the wind and the stinging blow of the frozen snow seemed to fill the room. We lay and listened to the lonely cracking of the trees, swaying in the darkness. The closed silence was small and weak against the furious sounds from without.

In as quiet a voice as I could find, I said: "Tell me, Chmiel, what is the highest ambition of your life? You know I love you more than I could love a brother, if I had one. Yet you and I are different. You like what I dislike. And what I like you've never even heard about."

He came and sat on my bed. "Now listen, father," he said, "I have my theory. I never told anybody about it, but I do believe in it. It is a theory of universal war between good and bad. It is the one and only thing which is the same in Heaven and on earth.

"The evil forces envy the peace of Heaven and peace on earth and make every effort to destroy it. The good forces fight the good fight and hold their ground. The

Archangel Gabriel is the army of Heaven, and the soldier of any country is the army of earth. When war starts it isn't true that all Germany fights all Russia. No—the truth is that the soldiers of Germany are fighting the evil forces of the universe. And the soldiers of Russia are also fighting the evil forces of the universe. They have one common enemy. But they can not conquer him by other means except through sacrifice, death and pain, through offering their own lives and sufferings. That's why, instead of uniting and going against the common enemy they've got to fight each other.

"I don't know how it came to me, but I saw all this in my dreams. I saw that the Germans whom I killed forgave me. And if a German should kill me I'd forgive him gladly. For our deaths are incidents. It is through our fighting that the biggest victory will be achieved. The victory of everything that is noble and beautiful over everything that is hollow and ugly. . . ."

For a moment I thought him drunk, but he was not, though his voice was strange and foreign. I asked him:

"Chmiel, you never have told me what your mother was like. What did she teach you when you were a kid?"

He said quietly: "I never knew my mother. She died when I was born. My father was a peculiar man. After she died, he burned all her pictures. I don't even know how she looked. When I was seven, he died too. Since then, I've been in the military school. But my mother comes to me often at night when I half-dream and talks to me. Whatever I know of life and even more, what is beyond life, I know from her."

For perhaps another half-hour we sat quietly smoking and thinking each of us his own thoughts, and listening to the wind. Then Chmiel got up from the side of my bed and said, "Good night, father."

"Good night, Chmiel," I said.

In a short time we were both asleep.

When we woke up next morning it was late. No sun. A fine hard snow was falling and the wind was aimlessly running about and throwing the snow against any object it could find. We went into the hall to wash, but it was bitter cold there. We found a handsome big brass bowl and two buckets of water, plenty of clean towels and soap, waiting for us.

But Chmiel said: "Let us wash in the snow; it's so chilly here."

So we took off our shirts and went outside. At first it was fiercely cold and the snow was like red-hot needles pricking the skin. But Chmiel grabbed handfuls of snow, threw them on my back and rubbed it in. I did the same to him, and for about ten minutes we rubbed each other until we looked like a couple of boiled lobsters. Then he covered himself with a towel and went indoors to wash his face with soap. So did I. Fresh and hungry, we started to dress.

I watched Chmiel as he stood in front of a small mirror, combing his hair. He was harmoniously built, not too athletic, but slim and healthy. He had a big mop of bushy golden brown hair, which he combed back in Byronic fashion. With a youthful whim he wore burnsides. It was the gesture of a little boy who wants to be different. Otherwise his face was clean shaven. It was a square face, with a strong jaw-bone, a big open forehead of mellow lines, a classical straight nose, like Byron's, and an expressive, rather feminine mouth. That mouth contrasting with his firmly set jaws was the most important feature in his face. His hazel eyes were always clear and looked straight into yours. He gave you the impression that he was listening to your every word with courtesy and attention.

While he was dressing he said, "Darn it, we forgot en-

tirely what we came here for. We didn't tell those two girls that we want their hay."

"Well," I said, "we will break the news to them at breakfast." And so we did.

I told them that we had a requisition for their hay. I held toward them the slip of paper to pay for it. It was not money, but a requisition receipt which they would have to take to the city and turn into money later. It was for fifteen rubles a ton, while the regular price was sixty rubles a ton. It had cost them more than fifteen rubles to cut and stack the hay. They were overwhelmed with shocked surprise. They said that they had figured on selling the hay in the spring, when they would get a better price for it. On that money they had expected to live all next year. This way they would be left without a possibility of any income whatever. I tried to be as gentle as I could, telling them that, after all, the hay was registered.

"These are strict orders of the army," I said. "I hate to take your hay, but I have no choice."

"I understand. . . . The war is not over yet, and we have to go on," said Betsy.

Foolishly I picked up that thought and said one of those silly catch-words, "We are soldiers on the firing-line, and you are soldiers behind the lines." My words sounded stupid in this hour where two helpless old women were actually giving away everything they possessed.

"How are you going to take it?" asked Mary.

"We have a requisition for twenty-five sleighs and as many horses as are necessary," I said.

"Well, there are not more than twenty horses in the whole village. I'm afraid you'll have a hard time persuading the peasants to give you those."

"I have no doubt about that," I said. "They've got to do it. That's all."

The sisters suddenly became quiet and sad. But with the same beautiful manners and charming hospitality they continued to fuss over us as they had the evening before. I felt sick at what I had to do. Throughout breakfast every wrinkle on those old faces was tragic. But their eyes were dry and there was no sobbing and no sentimentality. They were giving the last they had, and they were giving it gallantly.

We heard voices outside. The peasants had come back. They had not forgotten our promise about the wood.

"What shall I tell them?" I asked the old ladies.

And then for the first time I saw their lips quivering. Mary, in a voice subdued to a whisper by tears, said, "Only not the birches . . . not the birches. . . . My father . . ." she could not go on. I gently took her icy cold hand.

"Don't worry, please. Trust me, and I'll fix it. Do you promise to consent to whatever I shall do? You will lose perhaps a little, but you will save most of it."

Helplessly Mary said, "Do what you want. We know it must be done. It must be done."

I went out. The peasants crowded toward the steps. I said:

"I don't want to talk to all of you. Where is the Elder?"

The Elder was ill and couldn't come out in this cold weather.

"Then give me three men you trust, and I will talk to them," I said.

I went back indoors and found Chmiel all dressed up in his fine uniform. The two sisters were packing a huge laundry basket with jars and packages of good things they wanted us to take along. I left with them the papers to be signed and went out again.

The three men chosen stood in front of the crowd. I said: "The first thing I want is twenty horses and twenty

sleighs. At once. And twenty men with hay-forks. Go down to the big hay-stacks and load a full load of hay on each sleigh. Here is the paper. You are requisitioned to do it by order of the military authorities."

The crowd went into an uproar. They shouted. They threatened. They bellowed. They threw caps on the ground. They refused to make a single move—no more authorities—no more requisitions—no more sacrifices. Freedom had come. Their scowling, spitting, ill-smelling faces surrounded me, closer and closer.

I said quietly, "My next step will be to send my orderlies back to the regiment and to bring a squadron right to this village."

They spat on that threat. "Your God damn orderlies and you won't budge from this village," screamed a woman's voice.

As usual, the women were the worst. Some of them were crying aloud. I tried to calm them. "The women don't need to go, but they will have to give a sleigh and horse if they have it." That didn't help any. My quiet reasoning and calm talk were getting nowhere. I felt helpless. To them I was not a human being any more. I was Authority. I was one who held back Freedom. I was one who ordered them to do things. Involuntarily I kept my hands on my gun. Most of the crowd had axes. I didn't know what might happen. I couldn't back out.

The door opened and Chmiel came out, his eyes narrow and his mouth tight, his stick in his hand. He passed by me straight into the crowd. Pointing to one man, he said in his sharp commanding voice:

"You! In fifteen minutes back with a horse and sleigh."

The man looked at him, silent, stunned by that sharp penetrating voice. Chmiel went from one man to another, choosing the biggest and the healthiest, ordering each one,

looking straight into his eyes. And to that personal order each man responded with silent obedience. After all, the rabble was a rabble, and thinking about it afterward I understood the Communists who accomplished everything through sharp orders and definite commands.

After Chmiel's interference, I picked up his tone and said to the rest of the crowd: "As for you, this is what you do. Every second tree in that avenue you can chop down. But every second one only! I will mark them and I will come back to see that you've done exactly what I'm telling you. The ladies of the house give you those trees."

The news changed them in a flash. The word "give" made them friendly and grateful. The men who had not yet gone for their horses started as fast as they could. The rest went with me along the avenue, and with my saber I marked each tree which they could cut.

In the face of the approaching blizzard we loaded all twenty sleighs in about three hours, and set out on our way toward town. As we passed by the house we went in to say good-by to the sisters.

They stood in the cold hall waiting for us. They embraced us, and for several minutes without saying a word, they sobbed and put the sign of the cross on us an infinite number of times. Then, out of a silk handkerchief which she held in her hand, Mary took two little crosses hung on narrow pink ribbons, her baptismal cross and her sister's. With icy cold hands she put them around our necks and tucked them under our collars. We left them without knowing what to say and how to thank them, and never saw them again.

XIV

I WILL LEAD YOU

In the blizzard we started from the village, Chmiel and myself, the two orderlies, eighteen men and twenty sleighs, these last loaded to capacity with hay, and drawn by horses either discharged from service or so bad that they had not even been taken. We rode all day and all night.

As is the way of blizzards, the wind did not blow steadily, nor from one direction. Like packs of mad white dogs, the gusts of snow were rushing around us in circles, in spite of our movement ahead. Around and around they raced, biting with stinging cold our faces, hands and feet.

Where we could, we stopped and got hot tea and bread. I watched to see that no peasant drank anything harder, because in that cold and wind, he might sit down by the side of the road for a minute's rest and never get up.

When we stopped at a tea house those peasants who had no cover for their horses took off their overcoats, threw them over the horses and rushed inside to get warm. When they put the overcoats on again they would enjoy the horse's warmth for a long time.

Whenever I got a chance I tried to talk to the peasants. They were shrewd and silent. My red cap no longer fooled them. They knew I was not one of them. They knew instinctively that freedom had come. Their reign had come. They had no tangible facts, but they had the same sort of unconscious knowledge which I had seen in the army when the soldiers began to gather and talk in secret, before the abdication.

"What do I care about this war?" said one of them, a heavily built man, solid-looking, in his fifties. "What's it to me? I know I can cultivate acres and acres of land. I know how." And he beat his chest proudly. "All I've got's three acres. That isn't enough for me. Will war give me more? Will Authorities give me more? Well, then,—what do I care about them? War!" he repeated and spat on the ground. "Nonsense! Enemies of the country! Fools! I'm the country. They never took land away from me—why are they my enemies? The Germans never hurt me any. Why should my sons fight against them and suffer?"

Of the Emperor himself he never spoke harshly. He was rather kind to his memory as though he were already dead. But—"There is going to be no Authority now but ourselves. The army isn't going to be Authority either. This once you have forced us to carry out the orders of the military Authority. But next time . . ."

He shrugged his shoulders and left the rest blank. Next time, I understood, they would arm themselves. True enough. A month later when the army broke, the peasant soldiers went home to their villages with rifles, munitions, machine-guns, even sometimes with light artillery guns.

He had his own idea about forms of government.

"We don't want any government. We can live in our village. And just so long as every man has enough land, we can go on just as we are now. Our Elder can solve all our troubles."

It was astonishing, after three hundred years of monarchy, proud nationality and a united country, that when I tried to tell them about state or national government, they were blank and uninterested. To make them go into a war with sincerity, some one would have to come actually on to their land and take it away; would have to pick up their chairs and carry them off. That was what Napoleon had

done, and they had beaten him. They hadn't changed since then.

We arrived back in the small town where we had been stationed for two months. Slow days passed. Spring was coming.

In the minds of all of us ran only one question. Will the war continue under the new government?

Two parties were working for and against: Patriots and Communists. For a few weeks after the abdication parliamentarism was entirely in the hands of Socialists and Communists, who were familiar with the mechanics of meetings and the expression of opinion. The Patriots at first were at a loss, but they recuperated quickly. It was a time of endless debates and meetings. But the forces and weapons were not even.

The Communists' slogan was: *Peace! Land! Bread!*

That of the Patriots was: *The Honor of Russia in the eyes of the Civilized World!*

One hundred and fifty million peasants made their choice—Peace! Land! Bread!

About the honor of the country I am sure they reasoned like Falstaff. "Yea, but how if honor prick me off when I come on,—how then? Can honor set to a leg? no: or an arm? no: or take away the grief of a wound? no . . . What is honor? a word. What is in that word honor; what is that honor? air. A trim reckoning!" And the peasants did not choose to reckon.

The Socialists spread the word that the officers and bourgeoisie wanted to continue the war because they had invested money in French and English enterprises. The Patriots said that all Communists were on the German payroll.

The mass of men took sides according to the personality

of the speaker, and enjoyed with gusto the new experience of talking freely. They would cheer a Patriot speaker when he reminded them that they owed it to their dead comrades to continue the war. Within the next five minutes they would applaud a Communist speaker who said, "Your dead comrades from their graves command you to stop this butchery." If they did not like the speaker they booed these same sentiments with the same enthusiasm.

But when it came to the ballot, they were not so naïve at all. Their minds were made up. Asked to raise hands for the continuation of war, twenty arms in every hundred shot into the air. The rest with sulky eyes looked around and remembered which men wanted war.

The civil war started right then and there.

The Patriots felt their weakness and tried to stick together for self-preservation. Different military units were organized: the Knights of St. George's Cross, the Shock Brigades, the Scouts, and some units among disabled men who wanted to continue to fight. These groups were the beginning of the White armies.

Everybody knew that in the spring a big offensive would begin. Our regiment was pleased. Most of us were thinking about Poland and felt that we were in a foreign country. We thought the offensive would take us nearer home.

The General in command of the garrison dreaded the moment when he would have to order the men to pack and go back into the line of fire. But fate spared him the unpleasant task. Rumor, as usual traveling far ahead of official announcements, told us that the newly appointed Chief, a St. Petersburg lawyer named Kerensky, was coming to visit us.

One day in early April we received an official announcement. On the following Monday morning at eight o'clock

the Citizen Commander-in-Chief, Kerensky, would review the whole garrison. Being the only cavalry unit in that section, one of our squadrons was appointed as his guard and escort. I happened to be in that squadron.

For about a day that business of the review which is always dear to the military heart occupied all minds. All inner discords seemed forgotten. Each was set only on making the best possible showing. Everything was cleaned and brushed and checked up. Everybody meant well and everybody wanted everything to be just right. Even the Whitest officers went around and reminded the soldiers how they should behave in a parade before so high an official. Some of them even tried to rehearse the parade step and the silent commands used in a review.

I think that we all—White and Red—found relief in the thought that some one was coming who was the official head of things. The army likes to take commands. It has the habit of obedience. It wants a Commander-in-Chief, who, it imagines, knows what he is doing. Unconsciously in everybody's mind were the words, "After all, the boss is coming, and the boss will tell us."

And besides that, there was curiosity: Who is this man who is taking the place of His Imperial Majesty?

In the Russian army there was an old superstition that whenever the Emperor reviewed his troops the sun shone. Every old Russian general or colonel will tell you that he can not recall a review by the Emperor when the sun did not shine behind him. The old privates believed it also. All Saturday and all Sunday they kept looking toward the sky, examining it closely. "What will it do for the new Chief?" The weather was wonderful, the sky deep blue, the sun shining. Under it, the snow would begin to melt, but overnight it would freeze over again. The field was exactly right for a good review.

The engineer troops built a handsome platform for the Chief and his entourage, and painted it the brightest red they could find. On it they set up a little canopy, and then they were faced with a problem. What should they put on the canopy to replace the customary Russian double-headed black eagle? They even held meetings on the subject. The Socialists said, "Hang a red flag." The Patriots said, "This eagle has nothing to do with the Emperor. It is the country's emblem. Leave the black eagle." Finally all came to an agreement and showed they were working together in a fine spirit. Out of boards they cut a huge double-headed eagle and painted him red. They placed him on top of the canopy. All parties were satisfied.

We got up that Monday morning at five o'clock. We cleaned the horses, and carefully put on their shining equipment, had a hasty breakfast, dressed, and at half past six we were all ready at the station, expecting the train of the Chief to be there with Kerensky to receive us, and to proceed to the place of review.

The train had not yet arrived. We were drawn up at the side-track on which the train was to rest. The Colonel sent me to inquire when it was expected. I went inside the station, where I had noticed that all the employees were also braced up to make the best possible show. But to my question the station-master shrugged his shoulders and said that the general disorder had affected him too, and that he could not say when the train would arrive, because it had not yet passed the big junction two hours away. He did not know how long it would take to pass the train through such a big junction, cluttered with all sorts of traffic. Besides, everything had to go through the political supervisor now, and he really didn't know when we could expect the train. Half smilingly, he wound up, "Well, when we see it coming around up that hill, then we'll know it's here."

I went back to the Colonel with the bad news. He looked at me and said, his shrewd eyes smiling inwardly:

"When I graduated about twenty-five years ago at the Corps de Pages and our graduating review was at seven-thirty in the morning, we arrived at the field at seven-fifteen. At seven-thirty the chimes on the tower of Peter and Paul started to strike the half-hour. With the first sound of the bells the bright sun broke through the clouds and the carriage with the Emperor and the Empress swept into the field." The old Colonel looked around the sky, misty and foggy, held his hand up. Drops of rain were falling, and he finished sadly: "No, he can't do it. . . . Tell the men to dismount and take it easy." He tightened the reins of his horse.

We took it easy from about seven o'clock until one. The first squadron, in its best nice clean uniforms, and its groomed horses, stood waiting for six hours for the Citizen Commander-in-Chief to arrive. The Colonel dared not send the men to eat, but gave his own money to serve half a pound of bread and hot tea to each one. The lancers stood quietly under that drizzling rain, but their faces were not at all enthusiastic.

At about one o'clock the train rolled slowly in. The Colonel mounted his horse, took out his saber, threw a command. The squadron, like one man, repeated the flash of the saber and stood motionless as though petrified. Even the horses, well trained, did not move their heads. The train stopped right in front of the squadron. The shades were pulled down. Immediately soldiers with rifles and fixed bayonets jumped out from every door and stood on guard.

The Colonel waited. The squadron waited. The train stood as though empty and lifeless. The rain drizzled. Nothing happened.

After about ten minutes, the door of a carriage opened and a Second Lieutenant of Infantry, who, we afterward learned, was in command of the train, stepped out bareheaded, ran about fifty yards to the Colonel and said: "The Commander-in-Chief asks you not to keep the men standing in the rain. He is finishing his lunch and will be right out."

The Colonel's face grew rigid with rage. He gave the command "Rest" which meant that the men remained on their horses, but not at attention. He himself turned around and took a short gallop along the track to warm up, perhaps to whisper to the wind what he thought of the new Citizen Commander-in-Chief.

In twenty minutes Kerensky appeared with thirty officials behind him. He certainly had a bigger retinue than any modern monarch. He was worn out and pale. He carried no arms, and he wore his military uniform in civilian manner. It wasn't of regulation color or shape, and he had on a civilian white collar. He had spurs which he did not know how to wear—they were pointed upward, and were a little too large. A cavalryman notices spurs at once, and he is annoyed when a man doesn't know how to wear them.

Kerensky went straight to the Colonel, received his salute, did not return it, but shook the Colonel's hand. He greeted the lancers with a hoarse, dry, hollow voice, obviously straining it, and went to the automobile which was waiting for him. The Colonel sent half a squadron ahead and half a squadron behind the automobile, passed the command to me, and took a short-cut to the reviewing field to see that the rest of his lancers would still make a good showing.

Along the street people were lined up and greeted Kerensky enthusiastically. He did not pay the slightest attention to them. One got the impression that he was above the powerful emotion which moved the crowd. I wondered how it was possible for the head of the country—which he then

was—not to answer any one who greeted him. I wondered whether it was weariness, or whether he was absorbed in the speech which he was going to make, or whether he did not understand how a leader should act. I didn't know. Afterward, I realized that he was in some sort of stupor. He was so weary with thought, with continuous movement, with impressions, with people, with voices, that he neither heard the greetings nor saw the waving hands.

In the midst of the continuous monotonous rain we arrived at the field. Kerensky took his place under the red eagle and the review started.

As each unit passed, he shouted with his broken voice, "Thank you, Revolutionary Infantry!" Or, as the case might be, "Revolutionary Artillerymen!" or "Revolutionary Engineers!" And the units would answer, "Ready to serve the country."

I stood behind Kerensky and watched as the units passed by. And I am sure that if the review had been on time they would have given a fine performance in spite of the rain. They were rested. And they felt proudly that they were the first revolutionary army. But that four- or five-hour delay had broken their enthusiasm. The units were sulky and gloomy. They made no effort to keep their lines straight; they hurried needlessly, anxious to go home. The head of the country seemed to make no impression upon them.

The cavalry, as usual, came last. We made a good job of our difficult review trot, and in spite of everything, we felt grateful when Kerensky greeted our regiment with: "Thank you, Polish Lancers!" For the first time we were being officially recognized as a nationality. That cheered us up and made up for the six hours of waiting at the station.

Then we were all placed facing the platform in as close formation as was possible.

Kerensky began to talk. He spoke with every last bit of effort in his body. He would put forth each word in a cracked shout, gasp, pause as if exhausted, then shout another word. This is what my memory tells me he said:

"Revolutionary Army, you have the honor to be the army of the first bloodless Revolution in the history of the world. I am expressing the thoughts and desires of millions of people whose longing for freedom has accumulated during three hundred years of tyranny.

"You have taken the power of the State into your hands. I will express your will so that with your confirmation we shall come to a mutual understanding of the future steps of the Russian republic. By the will of the provisional government and the people, I have been appointed the Commander-in-Chief of the armies and as such I am speaking now to you." He took off his cap and wiped perspiration from his forehead.

"You have heard many speeches of authorities who told you to do your duty, meaning by that word service to tyranny. I am speaking like one of yourselves. You are all sons of the Revolution, and I am one of you.

"Since we have achieved the fulfilment of the dreams of our fathers, since we have achieved the very thing for which scores and scores of exiles and political prisoners, men of future and of vision, paid with their sufferings and their lives, our only and greatest aim is to guard and preserve that achievement.

"Russia has entered the family of civilized and free countries. This war in which you all have participated is expressed in the statements of our allies as a war for civilization and international justice.

"If that war had been started by Nicholas Romanoff I should be the first one with all the power bestowed on me by the provisional government, to forbid you to continue

that war." Again and again he took off his cap and wiped the perspiration—or was it rain—from his high forehead.

"But this war was started by an international feeling against the continuous threats of German militarism. It was started by civilized countries with a high culture. Not to continue it to a final victory with these allies means to place our newly born republic in the ranks of dark and uncivilized peoples. I am sure that can not happen. When the hour of final battle comes you will fulfill your revolutionary duty.

"Your order and your consciousness as citizens are remarkable. I have visited almost the whole western front and with the exception of a few little disorders the army is stronger and has a better spirit than ever.

"The political units are doing their best to enlighten and enrich the knowledge of the soldiers without interfering with their military duties. The officers in command, with the exception of such incorrigible reactionaries as were immediately dismissed, are ready to serve with their lives for you, citizen soldiers, and for the country.

"The way you received and comprehended Order Number One shows that you are politically mature. I can verify that by my personal talks with thousands of your comrades from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. And I tell you that there won't be a soldier in the ranks of the revolutionary army at the head of which I am placed by your will, who will fail to do his duty.

"You will have to be always on your guard. Freedom of speech is established and everybody can express his opinion. The left wing of the Socialists is using legal means to try to convince you that you must stop this war. The provisional government, in its revolutionary generosity, allows them to do it, in spite of the fact that it considers their ideas absolutely wrong.

"The idea of Communism, the Marxist theory, is a political experiment which should be taken care of in time of peace. It has no place whatsoever in time of war."

His voice became almost a sob. The pathos of his intonations and his words was artificial and made us uncomfortable. Somehow the talk lacked masculine quality.

"But this republic is the freest one in the world. It prosecutes no one for his political opinions, whether expressed in printing or in speech.

"Let the dreaming visionaries talk and tempt you. I know that the honor of your country and the place which you have made for yourself in the world are precious to you. You will defend that place with your lives. You will not betray your dead comrades. You will prepare a noble future for your children and the generations to come. The enemy is still strong, but his forces are gradually bleeding. I am calling on you for the last effort—for one terrific smash which will bring about final victory for our noble allies.

"Like one man to another, I am asking you to swear with me, your Commander-in-Chief, that you will fulfil your duties toward the memory of every single one of those who helped to produce this remarkable Revolution of ours.

"I want to hear you say it. Will you go with me and smash the enemy as you never have done before? I am waiting. I want just one word from you. Long live the revolutionary army!"

The garrison shouted "Hurrah!" Kerensky bowed, then raised his hand.

"I, your Chief in Command, will lead you against the German bayonets. I will take a rifle from the nearest soldier. I am willing to die first in your ranks . . ." The rest of his words were drowned as the band burst into the *Marseillaise,* which for the time being was the official tune. Kerensky descended from the platform and, followed

by his whole retinue, walked in front of each unit, received the reports and saluted the standards. He seemed to feel himself not unlike the Little Corporal.

Immediately afterward he went back to the train, escorted by us as before. By this time almost the whole population of the town was gathered around the station. We had difficulty making our way through the shouting enthusiastic crowd.

He was probably much pleased with his speech and with the general attitude of the garrison, because he was much more cheerful than on his arrival. He smiled and saluted to right and to left, and, boarding the train, he stood on the steps and again made a short speech of more or less the same tenor. When the train started the people first walked and then ran along the tracks, waving their caps and hats and shouting, "Long live Kerensky! Long live revolutionary RUSSIA!"

But as we rode back, hungry and exhausted, I heard a soldier say: "Bunk! What we need right now is Peace, Land and Bread!"

Neither Kerensky's breathless words, nor the idea of bloodless Revolution, nor the picture of Russia in the foremost place among civilized Allies, nor the glorious prospect of a hero's death defending civilization, none of these things could erase those three words, Peace, Land and Bread.

It was as though some one came to a child playing with a little dirty doll made of rags and tempted him with a marvelous book full of bright pictures. The child would glance at the book and then pick up his beloved doll by the leg, and, twirling it around, would continue to have his own good time.

Months later I heard Trotsky talk to two thousand sailors. The subject of the talk of the two men was almost identical. Trotsky was sending the sailors on a new offensive

against the Whites. But there was a huge difference between the two. Kerensky flamed with exaggerations, he oozed theatrical effort. He used *I* so much that you finally got the impression that he was talking about himself, not about Russia. He showed that the speech came hard.

Trotsky's speech was simple, with no artifice to make an effect. But the manner and construction of his sentences were unusual and cunning. They were always formed in such a way that they seemed to be questions. After delivering in one breath a sentence requiring a certain answer, Trotsky hypnotically waited until that answer should be produced in the minds of his listeners. When he realized that the answer was not the one he wanted, he went back again to the same theme, and kept pounding on it over and over again until it was carved out in the brains of his listeners, with the answer to it to his liking. He spoke for three hours and not a single time did he say *I*.

When Kerensky finished his speech with *"I,* your Chief in Command, will lead you against the German bayonets," I heard a lancer mumbling under his nose, "Lousy lawyer!" It was the contempt of a professional soldier for a civilian who overacted a part he knew nothing about. "I'll lead you!" in any army is usually performed in silence.

Trotsky finished his speech with the words: "Your brothers in Germany, in France, in England, in Australia, and in America will watch your actions, and if you have to lay down your lives for the kingdom of the workers, your graves will be in their hearts."

I distinctly remember those two endings. Trotsky left the platform tired, but sane and normal. Kerensky almost slumped, and, as dramatically as he could, displayed his physical exhaustion. I hated everything that Trotsky was trying to say. And with all my heart I wanted Kerensky to be right. The wrong man made the right speech.

XV

THE CITIZENESS WHORE

A FEW days later a wire came from headquarters. In ten minutes the whole regiment knew that we were going into action. Around noon next day we were all loaded on two trains, ready to start west.

Our regiment was in good shape and well provisioned. In spite of the artificiality and lack of meaning in Kerensky's outburst, and the loose talk of his followers and imitators, most of the army officers tried really to prove that they could be efficient, that they could do their duty, as well of their own accord as by order of the Emperor.

But while we were standing on a side-track waiting for our trains to move the old station-master came and gave us a little news about the condition of the railroads. He was much distressed. He said that the word freedom meant to the soldiers that they could go whenever and wherever they wanted to, in spite of all the orders given in the name of that freedom. So there was a huge traffic of soldiers either going from the front toward home, or from the rear toward the front—wherever they happened to want to go.

No doubt the strongest emotion in any soldier during war is homesickness, especially when he knows that conditions at home are not too good. The station-master told us that sometimes a soldier would receive his weekly supply of bread and without anybody's permission, would go with that bread three hundred miles away to his home to give the bread to his family. Perhaps he would return, perhaps he would decide that spring having come he would be much

more useful in his potato field than in the army. After all, freedom is freedom.

They moved by all possible means. They crowded on the roofs of the trains. They hung for days and nights on the steps of the coaches. They hung precariously to any hold around the locomotive and tender. They froze. Falling asleep on the roof of the train, they fell down during the night. They were hit by wires. Nothing could stop them; those who did manage to get inside the train you couldn't drag out by persuasion or command or force. And whenever or wherever they went, they never forgot to take their rifles with them.

The officer in charge of the railroad station would commandeer a patrol of three or four soldiers to try to make their way along the train and to expel the people who didn't belong. First of all, they couldn't make their way, because often the inside of the coach was one squeezed standing and hanging mass of humanity. In a coach the size of an American railroad car three or four hundred people would be pressed. They stood, they lay under the benches, they crouched on the hat and coat racks and on the luggage racks. They broke the doors of the toilets and wash-rooms and filled them up too. If an officer made an entrance and asked a soldier for his papers and his right to continue the journey, the soldier did not reply. Instead he turned at once to the soldiers of the patrol, called them comrades and told them a sad story about his children and wife, and how they had not seen him for months and years. That cruel "officer so and so who was always against Freedom"—magic word—had refused him leave of absence for many months, though it was his turn. And in no time a sympathetic gleam would come into the eyes of the patrol and the officer would look like a fool.

If the soldier did not find a sympathetic attitude in the

patrol, he resorted to his fellow passengers, and their feeling of comradeship. Instead of dealing with one soldier, the officer would have to deal with a whole pack of mad, hungry and half-hysterical wolves. There were cases where stubborn or conscientious officers were beaten, thrown out, sometimes killed.

These moving soldiers knew why they took along their rifles and shells, and even hand grenades. We felt as though we were in a gunpowder storehouse, where the signs "smoking forbidden" had been taken off, and everybody walked around with a smoldering cigarette in his mouth.

The station-master told us that we wouldn't have much trouble moving toward the front line. It was in the trains which were going east, away from the front, that the main danger lay. The men moving from the front were to be counted daily in thousands. Still there were plenty of soldiers whose homes were in the west, and they wanted to go there.

Our Colonel took all this seriously under consideration. Regular guards and sentries were established at all the doors of the train, and a machine-gun unit was placed in the last coach and on the tender of the locomotive.

The moment the train stopped anywhere the guards with rifles dropped to the steps of the coaches and would allow no one to approach nearer than ten yards.

We soon realized that the old station-master had not exaggerated. When we arrived at the last big junction before the firing-line, Razdelnaya, the enormous station was a picture of Hell. The station was cluttered with dozens of trains. Each had to wait for its turn to be moved. Soldiers who had grown impatient with waiting broke into the warehouse and got hold of some liquor. They went on a rampaging debauch and tried to grab a train for themselves. Fortunately, our train was placed beyond the yard

limits of the station. It was too far for the drunken loose mob to come near, but we went down to the station and saw everything that was going on.

In that wild crowd of ten thousand or more people, there was not a single one who knew what to do, or what was going on, or who belonged where. The soldiers sat around in groups, burned fires, cooked their meals, sang, drank, played with women, shouted, quarreled. All the units were mixed up. The officers had no power. It took hours for a train to start when its turn came to go ahead. Small patriotic units tried to be exemplary but they were too few. Their exact discipline looked exaggerated and lost, and had a maddening effect on the rest of the mob.

At night our two trains moved into the station itself. We would have to stand there and wait for another hour, so they told us, before we could start. The fierce and decisive manner of the lancers with rifles on guard at the doors ready to shoot did make a certain impression on the crowd. Here and there a few soldiers tried to climb our train, but after stern refusals, they abandoned the idea. Uneasy dread quivered through the pandemonium, as in an office the noise of typewriters threads all other sounds. Even the lancers, always a laughing and wise-cracking lot, became quiet and looked out from the box-car doors on to the circling excited mass of humanity, half with curiosity, half with suspicion.

After much confused loud talk and dispute, the first of the two trains carrying our regiment drew out. The second train still stood in the station. In it were the officers' coach, the offices of the regiment, one squadron of lancers, ammunition and a machine-gun unit. I sat on top of the tender, with the machine-gun boys, guarding the locomotive. The long platform of the station was at my feet. The movement of the people on it, swarming and shifting, fascinated me.

When I was a boy I used to watch with a like fascination an ants' nest whose top had been taken off with a stick. That first second of chaos, of the twirling activity of desperate ants rushing in all directions, held a hypnotizing power over me. In a few seconds the ants would organize themselves and again start orderly work. That held no interest for a boy's mind, so there went the stick again, and I crouched watching the panic of thousands of little ants facing an unknown cataclysm. Their exasperating aimless energy; their convulsive runs, leaps, side-stepping turns, whirls, everything made me hold my breath and tremble with excitement. The same feeling came over me now. I even thought, "I don't need to poke my stick into them; they go on and on by themselves."

I lay down on the pile of coal and watched over the edge of the tender. I tried also to listen. I wanted to know what it was that all these people talked about; what made that terrific, continuous humming sound. Only flashes of words, shrieks, sentences came through to me. No beginning, no end to any of them.

. . . Kick . . . belly . . . Ha! Ha! Ha! . . . Revolutionary conscience . . . devil's mother . . . I won't. . . . I won't. . . . Hurrah . . . Hurrah . . . Just as good as any God damn officer . . . She let you . . . She did . . . the white-skinned bitch . . . Organize, Comrades . . . Hundred fourteenth regiment . . .

A song burst out, sudden and above all!

You fell the victims
Of the cruel fight . . .

And the piercing, drunken voice topped everything and everybody.

"Here is the train, my darling. Come on. Come on. You will get home. . . . Hurrah! God's with us. . . ."

A fantastic couple fought their way out of the entrance from the station toward the train, waving their hands and pushing people aside.

The man was a soldier of the Eighth Cavalry Regiment of Dragoons, half-dressed, with his overcoat over his shoulder and his cap on the back of his head, armed with an infanty rifle, saber and automatic pistol. By the hand he held a homely middle-aged woman. Her badly painted lips were parted in a stereotyped grin, her greasy dark hair dropping all around her shoulders. She had almost no neck, her loose head being set right above big flabby breasts held by a tight bodice of a moldy green color. The Dragoon dragged her by the hand, elbow or shoulder, letting go and grabbing again, making his way not in a straight line but swaying drunkenly from side to side, pushing and being pushed. He talked all the time, his loud voice terrifying, with an almost insane excitement. The woman argued with him in a silly coquettish way, laughing, "They won't let me in, darling. . . . Oh, you little stubborn fool. . . ."

"All right, all right, my dove. I'll find you a seat. . . ."

"Oh, no, you won't . . . stupid. . . ." And she leaned over against him, shaking with foolish high-pitched drunken laughter.

"Everybody get out of my way . . . I'll show you, mammy dear. Get out of my way, you lousy bastard!" He pushed a young station official aside so hard that the man's cap fell to the ground. "Can't you see that my friend and comrade, the Citizeness Whore, is going to board the train? Gangway, Comrades. Come on, my sunshine." The Dragoon stopped, embraced the woman tenderly, kissed her, then again began to drag her toward our train.

The soldiers around laughed good-naturedly and teased the two while they were pushing their way through the crowd. When they reached the entrance to the second-class

coach, where the offices of the regiment were quartered, the Dragoon began elaborately to say good-by.

"Now, darling," he said, "this looks like a nice clean coach. You'll have a grand time going home." The woman laughed shrilly and coyly started to wipe the perspiration from his face.

"I'm sorry I can't go with you," said the Dragoon, holding her by the waist with both hands. "But I'll be seeing you again in a few days. Hey, Buddy," he turned and addressed the lancer who stood, pale and silent, as a sentry at the door. "Move aside and let the Citizeness Whore in!"

The sentry, realizing that he was dealing with a drunken man, quietly refused to move. He tried decently enough to explain that the train was ordered to the front and that nobody was allowed to enter.

The swaying soldier bellowed with a great show of reasonable manner: "But, Buddy, to hell with the front! It's freedom now. Citizeness Whore here—make her acquaintance. She is a great little piece of meat, I'm telling you. She wants to go back home, and as long as there's freedom, why shouldn't she?"

The crowd around roared with laughter, and the words, "Citizeness Whore," flew through the air in a gale of joy. But at the same time voices quite seriously agreed that, after all, freedom was freedom for everybody. General opinion decided quickly that the woman ought to be let in. Voices from the crowd shouted, "Let her in, Comrade."

"What the hell, she'll give you a great time."

"Go in, sweetheart, the train is full of boys." The Dragoon, mad with resistance by now, pushed the woman away and approached until his nose almost touched the lancer's: "Who are you dogs . . . not to let me and her in? White-Hands louse! Stand aside you . . . God damn your mother."

The lancer, with the butt of his rifle, hit him in the face and he fell down. The woman gave an ear-splitting howl, and turning to the crowd yelled, "Murder!" The lancer jumped up on the step of the coach and took aim. The crowd shifted back.

The Dragoon picked himself up from the ground, with his whole face bleeding, and swift as fate, he took out his gun and shot the lancer dead.

By this time the whole train was in an uproar. The sentries jumped inside. The doors were banging shut. Somebody standing on the roof of the last coach, shouted: "Move her on. Move her on." I yelled to the engineer: "Go ahead." He answered something that I couldn't hear and desperately started the engine whistle, probably demanding the right of way. Leaning farther out, I saw the Colonel trying to lift our lancer where he lay with a bullet in his left eye. Behind the Colonel three or four clerks with Mausers shot above the heads of the crowd. The bullets struck the station windows, which broke and started an uproar inside. The Colonel bent over, somebody helped him, and they pulled the body in and shut the door.

The Dragoon was still yelling hoarsely and trying to get loose from a few soldiers who held him. But the mob was already in a madness of destruction. With kettles and rifle-butts they smashed the windows of the coach and started to climb into the train. Some of them ran to the locomotive and tried to unhook it.

When I saw the men pulling and jerking the bolts of the couplings, I shouted something—I don't remember what. They kept on. I shot into their heads and shoulders. One fell down and stayed on the tracks; another, holding his side, backed away. A third leaned against the side of the tender and remained like that. The engineer of the train, still keeping up his shrill whistle, without knowing whether

the tracks were free, started to move slowly ahead. When the crowd saw that the train was escaping a helpless rage shook them. Shots came toward us from all directions. Bullets whizzed around, hitting the sides of the cars and smashing the windows. Some of the men, now utterly mad, threw themselves against the train, trying to hang to the handles of the doors, and to climb on the roofs.

It was as if the crowd were trying to pull back the train with their bare, madly waving hands. They scratched the walls of the cars with their nails. Some of them were pushed under the wheels; some of them were shot by their own comrades. Suddenly, on the opposite side, I saw two men who were trying to do something to the engine, screeching and scratching like cats, scratching at the locomotive as though it were alive.

If any of them got on the tender or locomotive and killed the engineer, the train would either stop or it would crash. And if that happened, the whole regiment would be blown up or torn to pieces. I jumped to the two lancers who were with me. "Boys, watch the other side. . . ." And I gave them my two Mausers. Each had also one of his own. They lay down on the edge of the tender and started to shoot at the soldiers hanging below. I shifted the machine-gun to the edge of the roof of the first coach, trained it down on the boiling mass of insane humanity and let it go. I saw clearly where the bullets lit. I felt cold, disgusted, without rage or hate, my teeth chattering in the same rhythm as the racket of the machine-gun.

At that rattling sound, of all sounds the most dreaded by the soldier, the crowd pushed away from the track and left about a dozen bodies lying on the platform.

Behind the windows of station buildings, I saw soldiers clinging to the sills and aiming at me. I shifted the nozzle toward them and let the gun go again and again. By this

time the train was moving fairly fast. From the roof of the coach I could see about fifty bodies lying on the tracks, some cut by the wheels, some shot. Some of them were moving in agony. One of the lancers shouted to me over the noise of the train that the engineer had said that the track was open and we could go ahead. He was moving full steam forward.

That night nobody slept on our train. Each man sat or lay in silence.

We had started a new phase of the war. Six of our men had been wounded and two killed. And those who were dead lay, their hands crossed, on the lower benches, and continuously shook their heads with the movement of the train. On their faces I saw again that expression which looked to me like the always unanswered question, "What for?"

XVI

TENORS OF THE REVOLUTION

For three more weeks the train edged along the track before we reached the concentration camp which was the end of our journey. In ordinary times it would have been done in a day.

But the long waits at stations and junctions did not seem tedious. The slow days were getting warmer. There was plenty to see and to hear. And plenty to worry about. For a while the Colonel was cautious. After the tragedy at Razdelnaya he turned each of our two trains into a fortress. Only one door was kept open, and that was heavily guarded. He held a formal inquest, gathering detailed testimony and signed affidavits, so that he would have a full picture of the riot for use in the trial which we all expected. The guarded door and the elaborate testimony were wasted. Nobody made any inquiries, nobody stopped our trains, nobody asked for explanations. This security was in itself a terrifying symptom of disorder. "Each man for himself," it seemed to say.

The official slogans which blared out in speech and in print at every station were denied by stubborn actions.

"Continuation of the war," said the official mouthpiece. Tens of thousands of privates took their rifles and went home.

"Revolutionary order," shouted the propagandist. Mobs of infantry men went individually after justice or revenge and got it.

"The first offensive of Free Russia," shrieked the In-

telligence speaker. "Peace, Bread and Land" was stamped out with fiery insane strength on every heart in an army of eight million.

Kerensky and his followers were staking everything on the coming offensive. It was their first big move. To make sure that the real army would fight they had mobilized a special army of "enlighteners." All the back-seat drivers of the war came willingly to do the enlightening. During the five days we stayed at the concentration camp we became well acquainted with these people.

Who were these nightingales and tenors of the bloodless Revolution? Actors, gigolos, writers, painters, poets, young stock speculators, rich parents' sons seemed to be prominent among them. Equilibrium was established by an exaggerated indulgence. Now they screamed for war in a slightly feminine voice.

So that the soldiers would swallow them, the speeches of these pleaders were wrapped in sugar candy of vaudeville. Here and there in the camp little programs were given. Each turn lasted no more than ten or twelve minutes. In between some flimsy actor in full field uniform would urge the continuation of the war in a short speech, which had been prepared beforehand in the propaganda section. The soldiers watched the vaudeville program and got their share of fun, but when the actor appeared and began his "Citizens, the Revolution demands that you finish this war," he was interrupted by shouts.

"Shut up." "We heard that yesterday." "Go on with the dances." "Finish the war yourself, sissy."

One of these speakers was a painter with a syphilitic face, who wore a black Prince Albert coat over a vest of pink and green silver brocade. He looked over the mob through a silver lorgnon which hung from a black ribbon. In a husky indistinct voice, he began,

"Rameses of human rights! Prometheuses of universal upheaval! Cyclops of destiny! Robespierres of tyranny!" Suddenly, like a magician, he flung out of his pockets the flags of all nations and waving them above his head, he shouted: *"Allons, enfants de la patrie . . ."* And in a monotonous, singsong voice, the word "forward" in all languages: *"Vpered! Avanti! En avant! Forward! Naprzod! Adelante!"* And so on until the crowd burst into applause. The soldiers probably thought that this was a clown, who, before the Revolution, had worked for the bourgeoisie and lazy classes. With freedom he was doing his act for their amusement. They roared, being well pleased.

He was followed by a poet who had written a long poem about the Holy Gray Mob, a tall lean scarecrow of a fellow, his hairless face pale behind a pince-nez. He recited his lengthy meaningless lines, stepping with artificial pathos on the rhymes, and emphasizing them with monotonous gestures of both arms. The soldiers listened with bored inattention to his nasal voice until he wound up:

"Holy Gray Mob, I invite you to wipe off your bloody bayonets on the chemises of the Viennese cocottes."

The crowd laughed again. They thought this too was part of a program for their amusement.

Then there were the military units of women. Twenty or more of these units had enlisted in the army, forming a battalion of their own. The authorities considered that they served as excellent propaganda, and they were sent to different camps to "lift the spirit of the army." To prove their sincerity, they insisted on camping under the most rigorous hardships. Looking at their ugly figures drilling in the regulation army outfit, obviously made for the smallest man's size, none could doubt their virtue. None could doubt their honest enthusiasm as he listened to their shrieking voices, giving and receiving commands.

But at night the soldiers would recall that in spite of the uniform these were women. The female platoon would find itself attacked by hundreds of howling roughnecks and would scream for help. The political commissioners would try to shame the men in the name of the bloodless Revolution, and suggest that they might better go and fight the Germans. Sometimes the men would listen; sometimes not. Machine-guns would be summoned to uphold the official propaganda.

A singer from a Moscow night club with no voice at all, crooned small monotonous songs about a lady who liked a yellow Chinaman in San Francisco, then a brown Portuguese in Lisbon, then a purple Nigger in Harlem. Each stanza ended: "Who's kissing your cold white fingers now?" He sang a song about a little girl of ten, unhappy, walking in the rain along the boulevards of Moscow begging for a tiny shot of cocaine. And another about a girl who lost her handkerchief and then her gloves and then her blouse and then her skirt, until finally she had lost everything. He sang them seriously and slowly, fingering a flimsy silk handkerchief as though he were singing through bitter tears.

The soldiers did not wait for the end of his performance. As soon as he appeared they began to boo and laugh, and kept on doing so straight through his program. At the end he began in a coquettish manner to plead with them to continue the war.

There were also the shy young men who did their work individually. Tenderly they would mix with the soldiers and talk to them about going on with the war. One could see how they found a perverse satisfaction in mingling with the mass of healthy smelly males. Once I heard a whisper through a light partition in a barrack. One man was murmuring to another, "Sweetheart, we will go against the Germans together and we will die together."

Among all these there appeared now and then brilliant men of liberal mind and beautiful ideas, doctors of Oxford and Cambridge, writers, newspapermen and students of politics. But they were so idealistic and so full of English parliamentary theory that the crowd, drunk with its own importance and power, did not respond to them. Yet even these speakers bragged of their bloodless Revolution while they advocated a bloody war. They did not see that the mob had already unconsciously begun to reverse the two.

The Kerensky Revolution threw this whole crowd of ex-Bohemians and dreaming theorists into prominence. The Communist Revolution blew them away like so much sawdust.

Then there were also a few soldiers, remnants of officers and men who had been wounded and who had paid with their arms, or legs, or eyes. With tragic sincerity they pleaded for war. The mass of soldiers was cold to these wounded. I saw a speaker with one eye, one arm and one leg, the wreckage of a human body. He stood on the platform leaning against his crutches, with his one eye too wide open, as it always is when a man gets accustomed to using one eye instead of two. Without a single gesture, he shouted at the mass of men, trying to hypnotize them. He told them that by their victory, he expected them to repay for his leg and his arm. Then awkwardly he turned around and asking a man near by to help him, he took off his tunic and showed his stump of arm which was making short grotesque movements around his shoulder. The man meant what he said. He was almost crying. But while the men listened with official politeness, there was no warm response to his talk—or to his mutilated helplessness.

Even colder was the reception given to the soldiers and officers of the Cavaliers of St. George's Cross. Undoubtedly they were the proudest battalions in the whole disintegrated

army. Their speeches were disciplined and orderly. They knew what they wanted. When one of them climbed the platform to speak, the soldiers would mutter, "This man wants to continue the war. He wants to keep up our suffering. He's for tyranny. He stands for authority. These men want to get power through continuing the war." And so their speeches were received with silent shut mouths and sulky eyes.

Here and there an ordinary soldier pleaded for war. These were usually young boys without homes, for whom the army was home. They had been mobilized too young to get established in a trade and the war became their trade. They could not see themselves demobilized and thrown out into an uncertain existence. But they were bone of bone and flesh of flesh of the soldiers themselves. These were the most successful speakers. They talked the mob's language. They did not play around with any politics. Their speeches could be condensed into one sentence:

"Say, Buddies, let us finish the job, quit, and to hell with it."

And the mass of soldiers shouted with laughter, and yelled, "You son of a gun, that's right. Let's finish the job and to hell with it."

Those in command thought, "Good, the soldiers are convinced and now they'll go and fight." But the soldiers were convinced only to the extent of a jolly form of speech. They enjoyed the joke, but their deep inward conviction stood untouched.

The professors, the wounded, the men of the St. George's Battalion, the homeless young soldiers, these were all who spoke seriously for war. They were few. They were painfully outnumbered by the scum which crowded the platforms and the speakers' places.

I omit from all these activities the bulk of the officers

who naturally wanted war. They were like a numb finger on a frozen hand. The abdication had made them psychologically useless, made them numb. There was an impetus in them, but its aim was lost. There was no blood circulating in that body. They looked doomed, vanquished. But they continued to make the best showing they could.

The really best kind of White—which means conservative Royalists—were the old non-commissioned officers, the sergeants, the corporals, who did not reason, who made no compromises, but held to the idea of Empire and preferred to die, torn to pieces by the mob, rather than to make any bargain.

And last, one more group there was that made small noise. They worked as individuals—and their speeches were short. Under their breaths they spoke, and they said:

"Remember. What you need is Bread! Land! Peace!"

"Bread! Land! Peace!"

And the soldier would nod and remember.

By this time Communist propaganda was already being persecuted. At least in the army, the provisional government tried to shut the mouths of those who opposed the war. But the Communists were as efficient underground as they would have been above ground. Their real work was under cover. They never called public attention to it. They knew the people. They had no delusions about them. They whispered three words, then waited three months, then acted.

Meantime, the political commissioners who were in command of the whole mess, voiced their reports with enthusiasm. "The revolutionary army," they said, "is spirited as never before and is ready to go ahead."

The officers who had been in constant touch with the soldiers during the three years of war, knew better. They shrugged their shoulders, tried to argue, tried to prove that

even if the soldiers shouted "Hurrah!" they did not mean that they would go over the top. These were called reactionaries. They were charged with sabotage.

"You come from a different class and can not understand the real people."

The tenors of the Revolution were taking their high note, and did not see that the house was on fire. Kerensky, nightingale-in-chief, sang and saw nothing around him. Strength was required—he had only sugar to give. On top of everything he appeared among us, received the loudest ovation possible, read all the reports and ordered the big spring offensive, the first offensive of the revolutionary army.

But many experienced colonels and captains placed trusted machine-gun units behind the ranks which were supposed to go against the German lines. It would have been better if they hadn't done it. Many of them paid with their lives for that precaution.

XVII

GETTING READY

MEANTIME the concentration camp was boiling with more practical preparations for the big offensive. At headquarters the commanding officers were studying maps and the reports of scouts. Munitions were assembled, the new hand grenades just received from France were distributed. No longer did a solitary airplane pass over two or three times a day. Now whole flocks flew steadily on their business all day long and all night. Their monotonous droning sound annihilated bit by bit the last haven of safety—the sky above. It could sputter lead, poison and fire, just as generously as did the earth and the horizon.

After the war I had a chance to talk to the Austrians and the Germans. They had known every move which we made, and they had found out without much effort. The revolutionary army was so busy showing off its first offensive that there was no more secret in it than in the games of children.

But the Germans miscalculated. Their strategists arranged their plans so that with the first impulse the Russians would move deep into the German lines, and then by flank movements would be cut off. The Germans believed that they still had to deal with a regular army, which would move ahead in some degree of order. But as soon as the actual offensive began, the soldiers of the "Holy Gray Mob" showed they had no such intention.

Some of them did not move at all, some of them moved ahead as far as seemed safe, and then stopped; some of them

turned about face and moved in the opposite direction. Some, after receiving the command to advance, called meetings and asked the political commissioners whether the command was all right. And still others with hearts set on victory, with banners flying and with bands playing the *Marseillaise,* fought like mad wolves for no purpose and with no achievement. Facing the colossal disorder, the Austrian and German command for a while was lost.

A few short marches from the camp and our regiment received its command to occupy a certain grove on our side of the line of defense and to stand by there. The infantry, supported by artillery fire, was to go ahead of us, attack the Austrian trenches and make a wide break in them. Our regiment of Polish Lancers was supposed to go right on their heels, spread to the left and right, and pursue the enemy. Through the same break the large mass of Russian cavalry, which was waiting, would leap on the second line of Austrians and Germans, if possible from the sides and the rear, aiming either to rout them completely or to surround them. It sounded so neat and clear on paper. Our Colonel explained it to us with serious face and shining eyes. Each of us tried to understand and to do his job as well as he could.

The night before the attack we spent on the edge of the assigned grove in a cattle shed which had a roof but no walls. The Colonel held a council in the darkness, playing his flashlight on the maps. In the queer dim circle of light I remember seeing the smiling eager face of Chmiel and the serene face of the Colonel, like a good teacher intent on trying to explain to-morrow's lesson in clearest detail.

Cornet Mukke was holding the map and sometimes the flash caught his intelligent young forehead, frowning, trying to grasp the larger strategic meaning of the whole operation. I thought, "Mukke is wondering if this is his chance

to begin his career as a Napoleon." Mukke was a nice ambitious youngster. He had studied all military authorities earnestly and his erudition in military matters was enormous. It was really worthy of something better than this war. The other officers liked and teased him. Sometimes when he turned the conversation toward the mistakes which Hannibal had made when he crossed the Alps they would start an argument, teasing him with false figures, and pretending that they knew the subject better than he did and had read more authorities than he had ever heard of. In truth most of them were interested in only one "Hannibal," the big black horse that had won last year's regimental races.

Sometimes when there was nothing to do, the evening long, cards played out, stories told, the old magazines and papers read, we asked Mukke to tell us about the battle of Leipzig, or the campaigns of Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden. He was always overwhelmed with joy and, at first blushing but gradually taking hold of everybody's attention, told us in full detail, dates, hours and length of battles, the numbers of regiments involved, and as far as he could learn, all the changes of weather that had occurred. This he considered especially important, his theory being that big strategists were always beaten by weather. At the end of his lecture everybody would be comfortably snoring or dozing, and Mukke would be talking to himself. He was not offended by that. His enthusiasm was beyond such tricks.

But in the trenches or on reconnoiter Mukke was helpless. I have no doubt that being only twenty-three years old he would freely have given advice at headquarters, but when he was asked to take two lancers and reconnoiter a village five miles away, he was lost. He saw everything on such a huge scale. He was the only one of us who gave no thought to the Revolution and all the questions it brought

up. I presume in his books he had not found an instance where the soldiers refused to obey their leaders. If it happened the historians had failed to put it down. So Mukke did not bother with such details. He waited for big masses of warriors to follow the grand gesture of a leader who, pointing at the cannon of the enemy, shouted "Forward!" I'm sure this was the way that he anticipated the oncoming day. The Galician village, Krechowitze, would be Arcola for him, and on this short night, Rembrandt's dark light modeled out his youthful face with a heroic and inspired touch.

We went and explained our problems to the lancers. They were all slightly grateful to us; they knew that big things were expected of them on the morrow, and they enjoyed being called into council.

The night was quiet. Sound seemed to have died with the day. Now and then a single rifle shot made the embracing stillness deeper. Airplanes hummed, whether German planes or ours we could not see. No fires were burning. Few could sleep. The lancers were feeding their horses with oats from the hand; they were checking the saddles and reins. Walking among them you could see heads turning toward the black west, looking into its impenetrable wall. Not being able to see the eyes, not even the whites of the eyes, yet one knew that the gaze was deep and piercing.

At four o'clock in the morning heavy artillery fire was to open the show. At quarter to four there was not a man with a watch who did not stare at it waiting for it to touch the hour.

I was standing by my horse in pitch darkness, leaning against her, holding my left hand in my right, and looking at the radium arrow of my wrist-watch which moved so slowly toward four o'clock. From fifteen minutes to four until the very last second I could not take my eyes off the arrow. In the mute hush I heard my horse move or

sigh, then a lancer's whisper, "Have you an extra buckle?" The answer came unexpectedly loud, "No," and it made all the horses near by lift their heads and turn them in the direction of the voice. I knew that they all pricked up their ears. A lancer behind me came like a ghost between two horses' buttocks and touched me on the shoulder. He brought his face close to my ear, "Say, Stach, are you going to take the ration of oats with you?" He mistook me for a lancer pal of his. I answered him in a whisper. "I'm not Stach, but you are going to take the oats with you, and so is he, and if I catch you throwing it away—two hours on duty."

"Righto, Sir Lieutenant."

Cavalrymen, before an attack, always try to lighten their sacks as much as they can. You have to watch them, otherwise they would throw everything away. Another lancer who stood by and heard the blunder, burst into hushed laughter. A voice from behind me said slowly, "Shut up, you dumb rooster."

Out of the stillness came voices, as if from another sphere or planet, "Have you written your wife? I wonder how mine is over there?" meaning that she had been left in Poland while he had been in Russia these three years. And then for a while you could hear nothing but the crunching sounds of horses chewing oats. "I wonder if Chmiel has his white gloves on?" some one asked. There was no answer. Suddenly a loud curse cut through the silence. A horse had stepped on a lancer's foot, and the lancer hit her in the belly, then, good-naturedly, scolded her as if she understood.

A restless lancer would tickle a comrade's ear with a straw or piece of hay and you heard subdued laughter, or possibly a coarse joke.

Nobody spoke a word about the coming attack or the

coming danger, about the barbed wire or the machine-gun nests and heavy artillery, which would answer when our cannon started. Whatever each man thought about the danger, about wounds, about death, none spoke of them.

In lingering seconds the fifteen minutes passed. At one minute to four every one held his breath and stood motionless.

Then the thunder rolled forth. It did not commence at five minutes before four or at three minutes after, but promptly at four o'clock. If the firing had been delayed five minutes or seven minutes, it would have sunk the hearts of the men and left them unready for the fight. But if some fiery archangel had appeared and granted to each of us our most secret wishes, our joy could not have been greater than when we heard that first crash two miles behind us exactly on time. In that exactness we felt secure.

It did not stop, but went on and on. When the first excitement was over, there was another wait. It was the turn of the Germans to answer. Almost at once the answer came. Their guns were musically lower than ours and had more air sound—like a breath of air mixed with a cough. Ours were more like a cackle, with steel in the sound. Strange to say, the Germans were not directly opposite us but to the left and far to the right.

Mukke ran to me, and with the enthusiasm of a scholar, cried:

"They're not shooting in front of us. Do you realize what it means? Maybe their artillery is on the right and left flanks and they haven't any guns facing us. Or maybe they're purposely keeping them silent. When we move forward they'll start firing and cut us off from the rest of the troops. We'll be in a cul-de-sac."

"You mean in a bag," I said.

"In a cul-de-sac," he said.

"In a bag," I said.

"All right, in a bag. And do you know what I'd do? I'd change the plans of our attack. I'd make a demonstration where the main blow is supposed to be. And meantime I'd concentrate all our forces on an encircling movement to the left and to the right."

"Go and tell it to headquarters," I said. "Don't annoy me now."

I must confess I envied these war enthusiasts the amount of joy which they could squeeze into all sorts of military situations. To me it was plain that from this moment on I didn't count. I couldn't figure out what it was all about, but I did realize one thing. It was the horse who was boss now. If she carried me, all right; if she stumbled or got frightened, or changed direction, or got wounded, I was lost. My old wise "Bell." I tenderly embraced her head and rubbed my cheek against her warm nostrils, and whispered, scarcely moving my lips, "Don't stumble, dearest—don't stumble." And I squeezed her thick lips and patted her, "Please don't stumble." Mukke and Chmiel came up to me and indulged in an abstract argument about the coming events and the strategic outlook. I listened and scratched Bell's tender skin between her front legs. She nodded her head now and then.

Along the German artillery and our own, the rifles of the infantry down below the Russian started a racket. Judging from the sound, they were in good form, even, monotonous, calm and regular . . . *Rrrrr* . . . *Rrrrr*. . . . The machine-guns were as yet silent, and we knew that they were being saved for later on.

Then came the most trying time. Another hour or two before the infantry would go over the top, and only after that our turn would come. There was nothing we could do during those few hours. An abyss of waiting. Our nerves

were pinched almost to the breaking point, almost to the state where we wanted to lie on the ground and say, "I don't want any more." A queer throbbing relaxation followed dazed tension.

The Russian cannon grew louder. It was clear that they were doing model work and that the Germans hadn't spotted them yet. At about half past five o'clock the field telephone rang. The Colonel told us that the infantry was going over the top and that we should get ready. All the officers had gathered around him while he was talking with headquarters.

"They'll start at six o'clock. Take your places, boys." We were disappointed. We wanted more news, but one never gets it at the front. We all ran to our platoons. Each of us in his own individual way delivered the news to the men. Each received an answer from the boys according to their feelings toward us.

Chmiel, who was on my right, said to his platoon, "Just try not to keep at my heels and see what I'll do to you."

One of the lancers replied, "Sir Lieutenant, don't wave that white-gloved hand of yours too much—the Germans will think it means surrender."

Chmiel just looked at him. The lancer hid himself behind his horse. The platoon laughed.

Mukke, planner of great campaigns, looked over his boys carefully, and said: "Tighten and pull up your girths, boys." His orderly silently and quietly came out of the ranks and tightened the only girth which needed it, that of Mukke's own horse.

The Colonel, with his hands behind his back, walked the whole length of the regiment between the first and second lines. In a quiet but happy voice, he talked to the lancers, calling them by name and joking about their shortcomings, which he knew by heart. He asked one if he had washed

his neck; another if he'd had enough to eat. He scolded a third because his horse was dirty, and the lancer clumsily explained that it had happened just half an hour before when it was dark and the horse lay down in the dirt. The Colonel answered that the horse could not bear to carry such a lousy lancer and had to lie down in despair. The "lousy" lancer giggled. The Colonel then entered into a sort of secret conversation with the buglers. We learned later what it was about.

Suddenly the telephone rang again, and the Colonel,after a short conversation, gave the command to move in threes out of the grove. At any moment the attack would start and we would have to be as close in as possible. The first command to action after that heavy wait of more than two hours was a relief. You could hear the air being taken deep into the lungs of the men, and hear them letting it out with a sigh. Noiselessly, holding sabers in the left hand and leading our horses close by the mouth with the right, in semi-darkness, we started to walk out of the grove.

We heard the whistling of Russian shells high above our heads, and that deadly sound at that hour before danger was comforting. It was our support, something to lean on. We felt as though the shells were a part of us, as if we were throwing them out from our hearts and following them in their flight ahead. Their unbelievable speed and power were pulling every nerve in our bodies along with them.

XVIII

MUTINY

THE Colonel was at the head of the regiment riding on his honey colored horse, "Daisy," about twenty yards ahead. He was the only one who rode. I walked at the head of the first platoon of the first squadron. Chmiel at the head of the second platoon; Mukke at the head of the third, and a young lieutenant, Gran, at the head of the fourth. Behind us were the second and third squadrons, and behind them was the fourth squadron, which was being kept in reserve.

When the Colonel reached the edge of the hill he lifted his saber high in the air, swung it in a circle, and dropped it down. Signal to stop. We stopped. I could see that if we moved farther we would expose ourselves to the German or Austrian infantry, which was firing heavily into the pocket between the two hills. Everybody was watching the Colonel. He was worrying. I could see it by his horse's behavior. She was restless, and stepped from one foot to another every second.

Judging from the regular fire of Russian artillery and from the indecisive German answer it was high time for the infantry to go over the top, especially since the German trenches were a mile away. In this particular section the German wire entanglements were temporary but strong, and it would take some time for the infantry to cut through even after the artillery smashed them. He waited half an hour. Something was wrong in the Russian trenches. In the ditch which connected the first line with the safe slope

behind the hills, we did not see any movement. This was queer. By this time some wounded should be moving out of the front trenches through that ditch to the back of the hill. We waited fifteen minutes longer. The Colonel beckoned to me, and said in a low voice:

"Give the first platoon to Chmiel and walk down and see what's going on there."

I jumped down into the ditch and started to walk. It took me about ten minutes to reach the firing-line of the trench. I did not meet anybody on the way. When I reached the line this is what I saw. Along the front of the trench stood a line of shock troops, in perfect order, calmly firing their rifles. In the entrances to the dugouts back of them lounged soldiers of the Izmailovsky Guards. They were taking no part in the shooting.

Right in front of me was a Sergeant with a gray beard on a young face. He had a whistle in his mouth. The end of his ear was shot off. From time to time he wiped the blood off his ear with a dirty handkerchief held in his left hand. In his right hand he was holding a big German ten-shell Mauser. The Mauser was pointed not toward the enemy but down his own trench. In front of him was a machine-gun propped up on two empty shell boxes and also pointed along the trench. I asked him what the trouble was. Almost hysterical, he exploded:

"These cowards! The sons of bitches! They won't move! They threaten they won't allow the shock troops to go over the top. I'm standing here and I've got to guard the backs of my men while they're fighting. Otherwise these dogs would shoot them in the back."

"Where are the officers?" I asked.

"They dragged them into the dugout and disarmed them. I heard some shots from the dugout. Maybe they're killed, I don't know. The Captain is at the other end of the trench

doing the same thing I'm doing. He's guarding the backs of his men."

"How many are you?"

"Eight platoons."

"What do you intend to do?"

"The first chance we get we'll go over the top and then let come what will. I wish it was my last day," he said.

"All right, it is now six-ten. Go over the top at six twenty-five. Our lancers will take care of those who won't leave the trench."

"Are you so close behind?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, "we're right at the entrance to the trench. We are supposed to follow after you break through the German barbed wire."

"Lord be praised!" he said. "I'll get the news along the line to the boys. It will cheer them up."

By this time the soldiers of the Izmailovsky Guard had noticed me. They began to talk and to shout, pointing to me. The Sergeant said:

"You'd better get away. Or take out your gun. They'll shoot you."

The Sergeant lifted his Mauser and directed it on the nearest opening into the dugouts. I took out my gun and hid myself behind a corner.

All this talk took place against a background of stonelike shooting from the shock troops. I saw a few of their faces. They bore the look of men staring into eternity. They were grim but strong, and with wide-open watchful eyes that did not blink. One of them ducked quickly and reloaded his rifle. As he mechanically put the magazine in place his eyes blazed hate and contempt toward the dugouts. Then he turned swiftly back to his job while the next man went through the same tactics. And so on down the line of men.

From my shelter I shouted to the Sergeant, "Tell the

boys to hold on for the next fifteen minutes. We'll be right down." I turned and started to run.

Panting for breath, I reached the Colonel and told him. The Colonel said to the bugler, "Officers to me." The bugler blew his trumpet. The officers galloped to the Colonel. He took off his cap, crossed himself, put his cap on again, and said:

"Gentlemen, I am going to attack the Austrian trenches in cavalry formation without any hope of support from the infantry. Go back and stand by, ready, with your men."

All faces suddenly became serious. Each man saluted in silence, and galloped back to his place. A cavalry attack on barbed wire, and into the face of machine-guns, had perhaps one chance in a hundred of success.

Afterward we realized that it was the only thing the Colonel could do, because if we had tried to subdue the rebellious Guards there would have been a bloody fight with nothing to gain. As it was, however far we went we would be that much nearer to Poland.

Intently I watched the Colonel. Human beings in real danger always look to something or somebody on which to rely. At first I found it in the sound of the heavy artillery, then it was my horse, then the narrow passage of the trench, where one felt secure from all the bullets whining above. I knew that in a few minutes we would have to go out into the open—into that deadly open, and be left alone. And almost consciously everything inside of me concentrated on the Colonel. In that moment he was the beginning and the end of the world.

The Colonel had been so unostentatious when he made the sign of the cross. I had only once before seen him do it. He too had to lean on something. I suspect that Chmiel's white gloves performed the same function for him.

The Colonel faced the regiment, and watched the officers

galloping back to their places. Then he turned around, touched the reins and his horse went toward the end of the hill. Bugler and Adjutant followed. He said something to them and they stopped, while he went on in order to see both trenches and the field in between. He was now exposed to full view of the bullets. He stood there perhaps two minutes, though it naturally seemed much longer, and we saw the slow movement of his head, bent a little forward as though he were almost inhaling the landscape and the whole situation.

Then he quickly turned around and galloped back. He stopped abreast of my horse, and in a matter-of-fact and sociable manner, said:

"Fatty, first platoon and second platoon, cross the ravine behind the trenches. Be sure to cross it in uneven intervals while you are under fire. Take your position behind the second hill over there and watch the third and fourth platoons. Start your attack simultaneously with them. There is a gap in the barbed wire, farther to the south. Remember after you cross the barbed wire to disperse your men. There may be a machine-gun nest. They're silent now, but I am sure they'll open up when they see us. I think the Austrians are just beginning to advance."

I saluted silently, called the Sergeant, repeated to him the Colonel's words and sent him to Chmiel. I then took out my saber and self-consciously gave the command, "From the right by threes. . . . Trot. . . . Forwa-a-ard." I know that my command did not sound as it usually did during drills and maneuvers. Being an actor by profession I used to make my commands snappy. But this time my performance sounded bad to me—an absolute flop. Well, at any rate the men understood me, and I started down the steep slant of the hill. I did not look behind me, nor did I watch carefully where my horse went. All I could think of

was that the moment we came to the flat surface ahead we would be put up for show.

When I reached the beginning of the open space—all this took place faster than I can write or you can read it—I said to the Sergeant:

"I am going ahead. Hold the men here. When I reach the other side shoot them over in sixes and twelves. But keep uneven spaces between them. And shoot them across full gallop."

Now came a tough moment. I knew that going across that open space I would have every single eye of my men on me. They would be friendly. I knew each of them as intimately as an officer could know his men. They had proved many times that they would do all in their power for me. With them I was never hungry or cold, or uncomfortable, never subjected to unnecessary danger. And they knew I always did the best I could for them.

But at this particular moment that did not count. If from the least motion of my back they could think that I was not going under fire as one theoretically should, as so many times I had asked them to go, our friendship would be dead. It is so easy to hold the chest forward, spine straight, behind drawn in, on parade, but so hard when you don't know which spot of your anatomy is going to be drilled or torn away.

In the flash of a second, just after I was separated from my men, I recalled a story my mother, who loved the whole Napoleonic epic, used to tell me about Marshal Murat. His Adjutant saw him before a cavalry attack with his knees shaking so that he couldn't hold the stirrups. The Adjutant said:

"You are not afraid, Marshal? Your knees are shaking."

"Let them shake," said Murat. "If they knew where I

am going to take them they would shake twice as much."

But then I said to myself, "Well, the show is on. Come on, do your stuff." And I tried with all the nervous energy I had to make the best regulation canter, sitting straight up, knees inward, heels outward, both hands on the reins, saber on the edge of my right shoulder.

I saw before me a hill of bright yellow sand, about two hundred feet high. Back of that would be the place to stop. Except for that sand-bank I couldn't see a thing. I didn't turn my head toward the trenches, for I felt if I should the first bullet would slap me right in the face. While I galloped on, the streaming bullets made one continuous sorrowful wail, like the howling of the wind in the rigging of a ship. Its whistling began abruptly and stuck by me through the whole time I was galloping. When I reached the sand-hill it stopped just as abruptly.

I turned quickly around and dismounted. I don't know why I did it, but it was rather an action of relief. I looked over toward my men. The first six had started and were traveling fast, almost in my tracks. I was eager to see their faces to learn whether or not I had made a good showing. I can remember in that moment of too quick and too lucid thought asking myself if vanity wasn't the greatest of all stimulants. In that insignificant ride, I didn't give a whoop for all the war or the Germans, the attack, or the universe. My only thought was, "Do my men approve of me?"

Holding my horse, I eagerly watched the men, who were approaching rapidly, bent to the horses' necks, in a bee-line to the place where I stood. When they were about twenty yards away I could see their faces clearly. They were beaming and smiling. Man makes a game out of everything. The first movement . . . my crossing . . . was tense for me, as well as for them. But after that to make the open space became a sport. When the first six came up

to me they were so excited they couldn't speak. I knew immediately that they approved of me. It gave me great satisfaction, which I expressed by climbing back at once on to my horse.

I looked into the face of Bartek, a long six-foot-two blond Pole, who was rather the joke of the platoon. Being good-natured, he could stand more teasing than any human being I have ever seen. I remember once he had arranged some nice warm bedding for himself in a stable, enjoying in advance a restful night. He went out for five minutes, and while he was away the boys put a heap of snow under his blanket. He undressed and plunged into the snow. Did he get angry? No, he laughed more than any one else. Now his face was flushed, and his eyes were sparkling. I had never seen him so excited. But the end of his nose was blood-red. A bullet had just scratched the tip of it, and the blood was dripping as regularly as water from a bad faucet.

"Wipe off your snout," I said. "I'll bet you did it purposely so that you could go back to the Red Cross canteen."

"Like hell, I'll go back," he said. And with his five-pound palm smeared the blood from his nose all over his face. The boys roared. One took out his individual packet, poured iodine on a bandage, and stuck it right on to Bartek's nose. He held it, pulling all sorts of funny faces, making the boys laugh crazily. I turned around and looked toward the rest of the men. The whole platoon was over. Not a single man was wounded.

And now it was Chmiel's turn. He started and we all turned our heads and watched him.

Letting the reins hang, he crossed that cursed place at a walk, took a cigarette from his side pocket, and without hurrying, put it in his mouth. As the men of his platoon flashed by him he would shout, "Got a match?" He reached

our side almost with the last one of his men. Well, he certainly beat me at the show, but I always did consider him a professional and myself an amateur.

We did not lose a single man. Bartek's nose was the only misfortune. The next thing I saw was the straight line of the remainder of the first squadron moving along the hill toward the open space. It gave me a start, and without thinking, I quickly shouted:

"Sabers out. Form twos to the right. Trot. . . . Forwa-ard." And at a light trot I moved around the sandbank. A few steps and the whole field unrolled itself in front of me. The first thing I saw, about a mile away, was a thin line of barbed wire and Austrians running toward us through the gaps in it. They were swiftly forming long lines and dropping on the ground. They started the attack on the Russian trench. Behind them were a few scattered trees, and black soil with splashes of water puddles here and there. In the distance, smoke circled high above a village. I could barely distinguish terrific explosions, probably the work of the Russian artillery.

As I was looking straight ahead, intent on figuring out in which direction to line up my men, there was a crash behind me, and I saw a cloud of wet black earth coming out of the swamp. The German artillery had spotted us and begun its work. The first shot was a little behind us. The second one would be ahead of us. We would have to hurry. I changed from a trot to a gallop toward the open space.

I looked to my right and saw the trench which I had previously visited, from the other end. Whistles were blowing in the trench and the shock troops were climbing over the buttresses, an action useless by now because we were taking their place in the attack. But they probably could stand it no longer.

Later I was told about a man named Vilenkin. He was

the son of a prominent Jewish family in Moscow. He had been wounded many times and was covered with decorations. After the abdication he had left his cavalry regiment and enlisted in the shock troops. When the shock platoons started to run toward the Austrians, Vilenkin, standing in full view, turned around and discharged his gun into the crowd of Ismailovsky Guard soldiers who refused to take part in the battle. He was almost mad. When the men came after him, he threw himself at the mob with his empty rifle and fought, one against twenty. All this under the fire of the Austrians. I don't know why the men did not murder him, or how they avoided it. He took part in the attack against the Austrians that day and was wounded, but not killed.

When we reached the field beyond our barbed wire, the German artillery was crashing through the opening between the two hills. Turning to spread my men, I saw one shell after another hitting the trench which just a few seconds before had been occupied by the shock troops. I saw earth, logs, bags of sand, and something that looked like parts of human bodies flying high up into the air. I saw wild figures rushing out and running in all directions. As through a haze, I noticed the lancers spreading in two long lines, and I knew that the only thing to do was to go straight ahead as fast as I could. I did not give a single command. Everything took place by itself. I waited, rushing up and down on my horse, for the men to connect with the third and fourth platoons. When they did I raised my saber to give the command to charge, and suddenly through all the noise, I heard the faint sound of our bugles. Four buglers were playing the first chords of the Polish national anthem, *Poland Won't Die While We Live*. That was the little secret the Colonel had entrusted to the buglers.

I could not figure out at first where the sound came from.

It seemed to come from above. The Colonel and the buglers were standing on top of the hill. The anthem had been forbidden. Like the *Marseillaise* and the *Internationale,* it was taught secretly to children and sung softly behind the hand. Now, for the first time, it was being officially played. To the Poles, the faint sound of their national anthem through the air was like a shot of cocaine. Before the song I had heard voices but couldn't distinguish any. Now I could clearly hear every line spoken around me. I heard two or three different voices yelling "Jesus . . . Mary!" About a hundred yards away I saw Chmiel waving his hand and shouting at the top of his lungs, "Spread out, you bastards!" For no reason I picked up the words and also yelled, "Spread out, you bastards!" The lancers shouted, "Hurrah!" The bugles suddenly stopped, and the sharp signal for a general cavalry charge sounded. I waved my saber and let my horse race straight across the field. We gradually increased our speed. I could hear the heavy thump of horses' hoofs, now and then the splashes of water, and the inarticulate yells of the men behind me. The sound of explosions and bullets had by this time become so monotonous that we hardly heard it.

Suddenly, in front of me I saw a line of bodies lying on the ground, shooting straight at us. They were Austrian infantry whom I had previously seen advancing toward the Russian trenches. My heart sank. When you see a man shooting at you it makes a much stronger impression than when you just hear him. By this time the horses were going like mad. Nothing could hold them. In the next second I saw a man's figure rising up in front of my horse. It frightened her. She jumped to the left, almost knocking me out of the saddle. I passed the man, and behind me I heard a sharp yell of agony. One of the lancers had probably nailed him with his lance. I continued forward. The

first line of barbed wire was fast moving toward me. It was a single line only, and it didn't look more than four feet high. I told myself I would have to jump it. If I stopped and looked for a gap they would shoot me. I knew that my horse could do it, but I also knew that the lancers' horses were not so good and that not all of them would be able to follow me. I remember saying "God," pulling my horse back before the wire, then slashing her rump with my saber and letting her go. She gathered herself together and jumped.

I was now on the other side. In front of me I could see the next wire entanglements about eight feet wide and two feet high. I could not jump these, so I turned to the right and in that minute I saw that about ten feet from the place where I had jumped there was a gap in the first line, which I could easily have made. I whirled around away from that low second line of wire, with all the impetus inside of me crumpled, crushed, exploded. It discharged itself in a loud voice. I began to talk to myself, "There must be another gap—another gap." I don't know how many times I repeated these words: "Another gap—another gap," but I do know that each time I said it I dug my heels into the horse's belly. I saw blood on her neck and on my hands, and I could hear her heavy breathing. Half the lancers had made the jump after me, and they also were rushing madly along that broad and low second line of wire, looking for gaps. Some of the men were on foot, trying to chop the wire with their sabers. The platoons were all mixed up.

Then the fearful sound of the machine-guns started on the left, and I saw the men around me falling from their horses. I saw horrible open mouths and vague movements of hands. We were caught in a narrow strip of field between two rows of barbed wire and a machine-gun was

biting into our left flank. I shouted to the men who were nearest to me, "Left rein—left rein," pulled the rein of my horse to the left, and bending low, galloped. I did not know where. There was no particular aim in my action.

Suddenly I saw Mukke. He had been over to the left of us and was now walking toward us. His face was bright poppy-red, and the top of his head was peculiarly flattened. It had been taken off by the flying knife of machine-gun lead. I could see something red and gray. His face was covered with blood. He cried, "Mammy." He walked two steps and again, "Mammy." Two steps more.

The first squadron, or rather what was left of it, was desperately trying to escape from the trap and attack the machine-guns. Naturally, the Austrians had concentrated all their fire on that long narrow strip of black earth, no more than about fifty feet wide, along which we all ran in a mad panic. Quite unexpectedly, I found myself near a zigzag gap in the second line of wire. The lancers were forcing their way through it, beating their horses and spurring them on. I followed. They were boys from my platoon. I recognized faces and figures. We passed the second line of wire. We were once more in the open field. Galloping next the men I knew was comforting and quieting. It calmed me down. I began once more to realize what I was doing. We speeded up as much as possible away from the gap, to give the rest a chance to go through it and also to change our direction and form a thin line to attack the machine-gun.

The third and fourth platoons, which ran the whole length of the narrow space between the two lines of barbed wire under concentrated fire, lost heavily. The horses threw themselves to the right and to the left, were caught in the entanglements, and groaning, kicking madly to get loose,

got more and more entangled. Some of the men jumped down from their horses and tried to cut them loose; some took their rifles from the leather straps, and lying on the ground, shot in whatever direction they thought best. But the rest of the horses jumped over them and added to the confusion. Or the horses stepped on them, or being shot, fell on them and crushed them.

Sometimes a horse in full gallop lost its man. Like a mechanical puppet waving his arms, he dropped out of the saddle, and, foot in the stirrup, was dragged through the mess. Or he fell across the barbed wire and hung on it like a Punch or Judy after the performance is over. Then the loose horse would run away and crowd in where it saw the other horses herding in bunches, thus mixing things up further still.

You couldn't hear much; you couldn't think much. You wanted only to shout, "Stop it, stop it." And more and more often you heard, "God!" "Jesus Christ!" "Holy Virgin!" and less and less you heard "God damn!" "Son of a bitch!" and "Bastard!" By some chance, so far I was alive. Far behind us the infantry shock troops were going ahead on the run, and the third squadron of our lancers was flying to help us.

By this time our squadron had lost about half of its men. There were no more than fifty left, and of the officers only Chmiel and myself. And here I realized what discipline and good soldiering could do. The moment they got out through the gap the few that were left immediately took an appropriate formation, each man fifteen feet from the next, and in spite of the failure of the first attack, started an attack in the new direction. The third squadron was comparatively fresh. It followed our tracks and did not have to waste time looking for gaps. But the horses of our squadron were panting heavily and the men were so tired that

their mouths hung half open over their clamped teeth. It wasn't a smile or a grin; it was like a row of shining teeth in a skull. Or the mouth of a cornered animal. This is its last chance to bite, and it is not going to miss the chance.

Usually infantry in an open field can not stand cavalry attack. The bodies and the speed of the horses, and also primitive weapons, like the lance, saber or hoofs, frighten the men. As soon as cavalry approaches within fifty yards of infantry, the infantry throws its hands in the air. But when a silent chain of men does wait until the cavalry approaches within twenty-five feet, and then with one salvo shoots straight into the faces of the horses and the men, the cavalry is demoralized. The sound of a hundred men shooting at the same time terrifies the horses so much that they rear on their hind legs or throw themselves to the side, or, being shot, fall down. Anyhow, they break the line. And that's exactly what met us during that second attack.

The Austrian machine-gun nest, which had been made up at the last moment, did not have any wire around it, only a temporary trench. Two squadrons of Hungarian hussars were in the trench in front of the guns. Being cavalrymen, they knew what they were doing. When we were about twenty-five feet away a Hungarian officer jumped out of the trench and shouted a command.

There was no way of stopping the horses. We knew we were running straight into the bullets' stings. There wasn't a man who did not convulsively pull back the reins. I did. At the same time I feverishly tried to work out some trick to speed up those dreadful few seconds between the Hungarian's first and second commands; to get through with the horror quickly; to bring down the executioner's ax at once. I kept thinking, "God! God! God! God!"

As if answering the Hungarian's command, crazy Major Butt, at the head of the third squadron, yelled, "Straight

at them!" in the same way he might have yelled on a fox-hunt, and his men increased their speed until they were going in leaps. I could not increase the speed of my horse. We were spending our last breath.

And then the Hungarian dropped his hand. When we were no more than ten or fifteen feet away a hundred rifles shot like a single one into our faces. I leaned far down on the horse's neck. The next moment I felt as if some one had pulled my foot back and my bones started to tremble like the strings of a piano. I did not realize at the moment that a bullet had gone through my foot. I thought that no one could come out alive from this.

Next, through the legs of the horses I saw the dirty sun-burned faces and hands of the Hungarians. They were throwing away their rifles and pulling out sabers. I knew what they were going to do. With the sabers they would first cut the horses' legs so that they would fall down. And then they would cut us to pieces. But in the next second we were behind them, and I saw Major Butt and a few lancers climbing madly toward the machine-guns. I followed. Looking behind, I saw Chmiel's white gloves and the rest of the men fighting with the hussars, who were on the ground. I reached the machine-gun sooner than Major Butt. There were three of them, spread over about a hundred feet. I hit the middle one. It was silent. Three men were trying to dismount it from its tripod. I lifted my saber to strike. One of them was standing holding the barrel in his hands. But seeing me so close he dropped it and lay flat on the ground. My saber whistled in the air. Immediately I shuddered. "I might have cut him." He tried to get up. Bartek hurled his lance. It struck the hussar right under his ribs. The man grabbed the iron of the lance and struggled to pull it out, or in, I couldn't make out which. But at that moment another man emptied

his gun into Bartek's body. Bartek leaned over on the lance now sticking into the Austrian's body. His horse ran out from under him, and he slid along the lance until his hands met those of the fallen hussar. And so they lay, forming a cross. Their legs were kicking slightly and it looked as if they were playing an innocent game—perhaps wrestling. Their faces were turned toward each other as though they were whispering. Only the lance, like a stark ghostly finger, stuck out from their bodies and pointed toward the sky.

Next thing I noticed was Butt roaring with laughter. He approached me, "My dear sir. Splendid attack. Splendid attack." Another splendid fox-hunt.

The machine-gun nest was on a sharp slope and gave us a chance to see the whole field. The infantry shock troops had reached the barbed wire, cutting it and jumping over it, and were on the verge of occupying the Austrian trenches. The German artillery was shooting rather lazily into the field, but in the confusion probably was not sure whether the field was occupied by our troops or by their own.

The hussars were strong fighters, but the moment they realized that the machine-guns had been taken they put up no useless fight. Quietly and mechanically they dropped their sabers and sat down. I saw them sitting in a long shallow trench, and our boys, some on horses and some dismounted, talking to them, or taking a drink of water from the hussars' canteens. Some were helping to bandage each other. The job was finished and they were resting together.

In the far distance, the fourth squadron which had been last in reserve, was going at a trot toward the Austrian trenches. Pretty soon we heard the buglers sounding the first and third squadrons to go into reserve. It was a relief to us, for it meant that the second and fourth squadrons would carry on the rest of the fight. Afterward I learned that the second squadron had been in the same situation as

our own, but that the Colonel himself, with the buglers and adjutants, had jumped down from the hill, and had led the second squadron against the machine-guns on their side of the fight. They had a much easier job because their nests were not protected at all by troops. But the second squadron had lost plenty of men in that strip between the two wires, just as we had. The second and fourth squadrons crossed the trenches, now occupied by the infantry shock troops.

We herded the Hungarian and Austrian prisoners, about six or seven hundred in all, and sent them back with slightly wounded lancers. Major Butt and I went among the prisoners, and Butt picked out every single officer. There were about eight. He introduced himself formally to each one. Major Butt's uniform, usually spick and span, was not so neat to-day. But his mustache was black and waxed as usual. To each Austrian officer he said: "What can I do for you, sir?" The officers were equally polite. After exchanging cigarettes, Butt proposed a drink of brandy which he had with him in the canteen attached to his saddle. The Austrians, with naïve charming Viennese sociability, clicked their heels, said, "Prosit," and drank. Butt in turn said, "Prosit," and drank with each one separately. There were eight officers and Butt got eight drinks.

I talked to the Austrian soldiers, as I could not speak Hungarian. The only question I could squeeze out of them was, "When are you going to finish the war?" I answered, "When are *you* going to finish the war?" But there was not a single angry word, there was not a single trace of hate, there was not a single, "We are right," or "You are wrong." They were like children after a tug of war. And if there hadn't been about three hundred killed and wounded who didn't care about anything, it would almost have been a pleasure.

XIX

ALL FOR NOTHING

WE BEGAN to disentangle the confusion and to set ourselves in order. We counted the lost men, examined the wounded, looked over the horses, sent reports. The sun was up and it was beginning to be hot. There was no water except in a little swamp at the back, and some trifling quantities of dirty snow which was melting quickly. The soldiers, especially the wounded, ate the snow. We sent a chain of men as a connecting section to get in touch with the regiment. They didn't like to go because their enthusiasm was over. Nobody talked about those who were dead or wounded, and the wounded seemed to worry most about their horses. Yet we had lost far more men than horses.

As the prisoners walked back, fresh troops were marching and riding up to continue the offensive. And you could easily make out which ones wanted to go on with the war, and which did not. Those who wanted war grew cheerful at the sight of the prisoners. Those who wanted peace slowed down their pace to talk to the prisoners, and had to be nagged by officers and sergeants. The artillery going at a swift speed, passed us and disappeared beyond the former Austrian trenches. A whole division of splendid cavalry, entirely made up of Asiatic tribes, also dashed by us to exploit the gap which our attacks had made.

We were astonished to hear the German artillery cease firing. Peace for the moment. How long it would last we did not know.

At about three o'clock in the afternoon orders came

through our connecting link to move ahead, to follow the Asiatic division of cavalry, and to keep in touch with the remaining two squadrons of our regiment. Obedient, but tired, and with the air of moving only because they must, the lancers mounted their horses and started once again toward the west. Until almost sundown we followed the big offensive. All those hours we were able neither to see nor to understand what was going on ahead of us. By this time our hunger was annoying. Since the night before no one had had anything to eat except muddy water and a few mouthfuls of snow. The field kitchens were far in the back, and God only knew when they would come up.

The artillery was rampaging somewhere ahead of us. The wounded walked back, more and more of them, and from those who would talk we tried to get such news as we could. Where is the third squadron? Where is the fourth? What did they do? What did they take? What is the situation? How many prisoners? The wounded man would listen and answer with eyes flabbergasted and absent, as if asking, "What does all that matter when I have this dreadful pain? Who cares about that when maybe I've lost my hand or my leg . . . when I don't know whether I'll be able to crawl another two miles? My head is more to me than the fate of your regiment."

Then again we met lines of Austrians, as indifferent as our soldiers and as blind, not knowing what would happen next. They were walking back without any escort. Some of them were talking, some of them munching something, some walking automatically. Often a wounded Russian infantry soldier would be supported by two or three Austrians. They would chat together in a most complicated mixture of broken Russian and broken German, with fantastic grimaces.

Because of the tired horses we had to march slowly.

Sometimes I even had to dismount and walk in spite of my wound, which was a clean hole through and did not bother me much. My orderly dressed and bandaged it tightly. I tried to listen to what the soldiers were saying. I did not hear any comment on the war. Sometimes they said they were tired or hungry or sick. But mostly they talked of bread—or land—or peace, and now and then of home. Once we gave the right of way to a train of ambulance wagons, which passed us at great speed.

We looked in vain for kitchens; there was none. All the boys, even Chmiel himself, who had probably never in his life been so happy as to-day, were absorbed by the demands of empty, angry, rumbling stomachs. Some of the lancers who still had their emergency rations of oats chewed them a little to get some saliva to swallow. Everything around was devastated, broken, smashed. There was not a trace of anything that could be eaten. This particular section of front was made up of so-called "movable lines." The troops on both sides had occupied it many times during the past few months.

Around five o'clock in the afternoon the German artillery suddenly began to boom again—harder and closer. In the next fifteen minutes we had our first coherent message of developments. Under the heavy shock of attacking cavalry, the Austrians and the Germans had given way about ten miles. But then they had brought their artillery around from the sides to the front. That settled it, as far as we were concerned. Our artillery answered weakly. Perhaps they did not have a good position; perhaps they had no shells; perhaps the munition wagons were stuck in the mud; perhaps there was another mutiny.

Word came to put on all possible speed to a place about eight miles ahead of us, which was marked Hill 13 on our military maps. No matter what we found there we were to

attack that hill. Being by now the oldest officer in our two squadrons I called the other officers to me and said:

"Gentlemen, we have to do it, but there's no use trying it with the men in the spirit they're in now. Go and talk to them. Let's start right now."

I do not know what each man said to his unit, but this is what I said to mine:

"Boys, there are a few of us left. The rest of the lancers are in a bad fix. We're commanded to attack Hill 13. That means you've got to make a new spurt. It's to help out the rest of the boys. We've just got to set our teeth and go on as we did this morning."

That was all I could say, because I did not want to go myself, and the boys knew it. The excitement was over. Only drudgery remained. I saw their eyes, dirty, red, deep in their heads. Steadily they were looking at me as if to say (perhaps I only imagined it), "Don't lie to us. You feel the same way we do. We'll go. There's nothing else to do. But what for? What for?" I was desperately searching for words, but I couldn't find them.

Poland? I knew that they knew it. Honor? Honor either exists or it doesn't, but you don't talk about it. Comradeship? That would have been silly too, because they naturally were the best comrades in the world. High politics at that particular moment? Nothing could have been so stupid as that. I wound up by appealing to them to be careful and save the horses for the last effort. The men understood that. They would save their horses until they were shot off the horses, or the horses themselves were shot out from under them, duty on both sides being thus completely done.

We moved on at a trot. Half an hour later a messenger reached us and told us to hurry. We hurried as best we could. In another half-hour three more messengers came

up with "Hurry! Hurry!" About six o'clock, at sundown, we arrived at a small grove where we found the Colonel with the pitiable remainder of the regiment. German shells whistling low above the birch trees with their white trunks and black branches, filled me with terror.

The Colonel and his men had had a much harder time than we. Most of them had been lost. If a division of cavalry had not come to their rescue, they would have been altogether wiped out. The Colonel had himself led the attacks, and had been slightly wounded twice. But he was suffering severely. His eyes were sunk in deep black circles.

With an effort he mounted his horse and gave the command, "Four squadrons, attack the enemy's battery behind that hill. No reserves. The field is clear." He knew it because they had already gone over it and been pushed back. In dead silence the broken scraps of the regiment, at the same tired slow trot, left the grove and spread over the unknown black field, in the cold air of the evening, under the slowly falling darkness. That attack was like a phantom parade, like a slow-moving motion picture, with the gray-pinkish evening sky for a screen. The lancers were no longer human beings; they were ghosts. The horses were ghosts. Their breaths were groans; mouths moved, but no air seemed to come from them or into them.

We moved through that field, which was about two and a half miles long. Far away from one another, because in an attack on artillery there must be fifteen horses' space between each two men, and going at a slow gallop like little goats on a merry-go-round, we were bumping up and down, gloomy, solitary, noiselessly going on and on.

We passed rows of trees, which were the border-lines of fields. We climbed over low stone fences and shallow ditches. We did not know what we were going to meet in the last half-mile. Would it be infantry again, or barbed

wire, or machine-guns, or shells? Judging from the sound, it was a battery of four field guns. When we reached the middle of the field the enemy observers caught sight of us. Immediately we heard a howling of shells lowered against us. The men and horses did not respond to them even by quickening their tempo. There was no more fear, nothing but resignation. We seemed helpless clay pigeons set up in a shooting gallery.

I did not feel much pain from my wound, though my whole leg was numb and stiff. I did not know whether I held my stirrups or not. But what did those feel who were more seriously wounded, like the Colonel? His pain must have been dreadful, yet not quite bad or merciful enough to make him faint. He was galloping not far ahead of me, his light honey-colored horse dimly outlined in the darkness.

When there was about half a mile left, the guns began to shoot straight at us. But by this time we were too close and the shells were bursting somewhere behind. We did not know how many we were losing. We heard no groans. In that same phantom-like slow gallop, we mounted the hill. And about five hundred feet below was a German battery . . . four guns and about sixty men. When we reached the hilltop, and our silhouettes were outlined on the sky, two guns kept on firing far back over our heads, and two were silent. A wraith-like silent ribbon, we rolled down on them.

A few short German words, a few figures on horses, rushing away into the black. Sudden silence. A few single shots from the Mausers. The German battery was captured. Many of our horses hung their heads and spread their legs. Many fell flat on the ground, too exhausted to move. The men, equally dull and silent, were standing about or lying on the ground, not saying a word. The artillerymen stared and could not understand who or what had captured them. To them too we were ghosts.

The German battery had lost a few men who had been trampled on by the horses. We hadn't struck a single blow or cut, or fired a single shot. The battery was taken by slow impetus and darkness. And if, after the attack was over, the fifty Germans left had wanted to turn about and capture us, they could have done it just as easily. But they were resigned, waiting for developments. A few of them escaped in the darkness but nobody pursued. Dragging himself with difficulty to his feet, the Colonel sent a section of lancers to make connections. Pulling their horses and dragging themselves up, six boys went slowly back into the darkness, without a word.

The Germans had some bad bread and cans of fish. And not much of either. They began to eat, and we stood around and watched them. One of the Germans offered a little piece to the lancer nearest to him, and the man took it and ate it. Then the German officer got up and ordered his men to put all the food in one pile. He asked us in fairly good Russian just how many of us there were. We counted. There were a hundred and forty-six men left of the regiment. That morning there had been about three hundred. The Germans distributed the miserable scraps of food as evenly as they could among themselves and our lancers. The men ate silently and sparingly.

The Colonel and Chmiel refused to eat. I tried to, but being too weary to chew, gave my food to the nearest man. At a little brook below, the Germans filled buckets and I slowly drank the water, which stank.

The Colonel ordered us to clamp the guns. We looked for our blacksmith. He wasn't among us. In the darkness we did not know what to do until some one suggested that we take out the locks, which we did. Some one else asked the Colonel if we could start a fire. The Colonel said "No," and we sat for about an hour, half asleep and half

awake, trying not to shiver in the cold damp darkness.

Suddenly we heard the sound of horses approaching. In a few minutes a Cossack officer with three men galloped to the top of the hill and shouted, "Who's there?" I answered. He came down to the Colonel and reported an order from Divisional Headquarters. We were to retreat immediately to the old position. All units were to retreat in full order to the original position of the night before.

We asked why. He told us that the infantry brigades, to our left, had refused to take part in any battle. They had held meetings all day long. The officers in command and the political commissioners had tried to get them to fight, but they would not move. There was even talk that they had mutinied, and that they had murdered a few officers. With darkness, the Germans had made a flank movement and all that section which had been conquered by our cavalry division was in danger.

The Colonel asked what should be done with the prisoners and the captured battery.

The Cossack said, "I don't know. Can you tell me if there are any units farther on your left?"

The Colonel replied, "I don't know, I've lost all connections."

"Well," said the Cossack, "then I'll go with you, and we will leave the prisoners here."

In half voices the command was given. Leaving the four guns and the Germans we began to go back. Some of the men mounted their horses, some of them started to walk. Still more slowly than we had come, we went away back down the hill, back through that dark field, back to the place where we had captured the Hungarians—always back. Marching all night long, we went far behind the place from which we had started in the morning. It began to rain about midnight and rained all the time.

We picked up about twenty wounded men on our way, also a few horses which came running back to the bulk of the herd. We did not stop at all until we reached a big, half deserted village at ten o'clock in the morning. Endless lines of deserting soldiers, armed and disarmed, on foot, on horses, on trucks, on gun carriages, were moving through, going east. Like a river, like a flood, in small groups, singly, in big units, with no officers and no orders they poured through, urged by an inner magnetic compulsion that was driving them away from the war, toward peace, bread and land.

We occupied some houses, and found plenty to eat. A few stray officers and cavalrymen attached themselves to us. Also, some more lightly wounded lancers came back to us. We stood all day watching the exodus, and hating the departing men. We felt as if each single one of those men going home had been responsible for yesterday's suffering, for our deaths, for our uncertainty. Marching fast to the east, they threw glances at us of equal suspicion and equal hate, as though they thought, "If it had not been for these officers driving us, the war would have been over long ago."

There were no connections with any headquarters, no orders, no communications. The Germans did not exploit the situation to move upon us. As far as we could learn they were staying in their old trenches facing our old trenches in which was a weak line of still loyal troops. That line was becoming thinner and thinner. A large number of Communists began to work with intense activity among the disorganized units, among the units still obedient, and even among the Germans.

In the midst of all this our two hundred men stood helpless and hopeless, not knowing where to go or what to do.

A few months later I happened to stumble over an old newspaper. I looked up the official communication from

Russian Headquarters. It said at the end: "The Polish Lancers distinguished themselves by charging the enemy's wire entanglements seven times." During the entire war this was only the second time that the word "Polish" had been used in an official communication. The first one promised independence and freedom to Poland if the Allies won the war. The Poles answered by forming legions and fighting. The new Russian revolutionary government officially recognized their efforts. But as to the promise of independence and freedom, it was left in the air.

"Everybody for himself," seemed to be the only raft in the flow of events.

XX

WE BEGIN OUR WANDERINGS

For two months we stayed in that village. Or perhaps it was three months. Time was confused. Weeks got tangled up with each other. We did not know what was going on. We did not know what would happen to us. We tried to feel our way in the miasma of exaggerated and fabricated news. We listened to speeches, to slogans, to resolutions, end on end, words without end, words, words, words. Desperately we sought some sort of solution for the two hundred of us . . . Poles astray in a sea of Russians. Much we did not hear about, but saw with our own eyes. Out of all else, like a finger pointing from a clenched fist, stood one thing: that for Russia the war was finished.

The famous spring offensive had stopped somewhere in the air. The German counter-offensive had faded out. It looked as though on both sides the object of the fighting had vanished.

Then we saw the Reds, their aim not confused, but direct and definite . . . to disorganize, to ruin the standing army. Before the war, the Communists had been neither the most numerous nor the most prominent revolutionaries. It was the Terrorists who were heard from most. Now, thousands of Red workers suddenly stood clear. Wherever a group of soldiers were, there was a man pounding into their heads:

"Don't fight."

"Take your rifles and go home."

"Go to the Germans and tell them that you are a worker or a peasant . . . just as they are."

"Tell them that you won't fight them."

"Tell them to turn against their officers who want this war."

The soldiers listened eagerly and learned fast. Cases of disobedience were commonplace now. Whoever tried to enforce a differing idea was shut off quickly and efficiently—was shut off for ever. In those days, the officers whom the soldiers disliked did not have a chance in the world. The anger of the mob would flash against them at the least provocation. They would be shot or murdered, and there was nobody to prosecute—nobody to ask who had committed the murder. In those cases where the authorities of the provisional government tried to investigate and uphold its authority, the mob of soldiers was like silent water . . . the stone falls into it and disappears.

Almost every day some one came and tried to talk to the lancers. But the sense of separation, national and spiritual, was too great. True enough, our lancers, after the fearful experience of the last offensive, wanted to go home too. But their home was in the west, in Poland.

The Communists worked hard. They had good material in the different nations which had been subjects of the Russian crown, Poles, Caucasians, Latts, Lithuanians, Chinese. The Communists were most successful in organizing the Latt regiments. The Latts had no national history as a country, but had been bitterly oppressed by Russia. They were a cross between the Scandinavian tribes and the Germans. Slow, thorough, mechanically competent, they were not bright, but they never forgot. Though it was not educated politically, their peasantry yet knew it was deprived of human rights. In 1905, the Latts had fought in horrible peasant ways. A homestead was fired, the family murdered. A landowner went out to an evening party. His horses were stopped. His throat was cut, swiftly, silently.

In return, the Imperial government raced executions throughout a whole county or group of villages without asking for proof. There was no treachery. The really guilty could not be found.

Now, eager for revenge, the Latts were the first, the most stalwart of the Communist troops. Ferocious punishments had made them stoic. During and after the civil war they were the troops of the Extraordinary Commission (Cheka), the Guards of Communism.

Chinese and Mongols came next to form the nucleus of the future Red army.

Another oppressed people were the Lithuanians. They were a Slavic tribe, colonized by Poles for centuries. A thousand years ago a Polish queen married a Lithuanian king. As part of Polish lands, Lithuanians became the property of the Russian crown—the object of Russian colonization. Its people withstood all that. Until the Versailles Treaty, Poland and Lithuania remained one country with two different languages. Then they became two separate republics, both ultra chauvinistic in their patriotism. The Communists had no luck with the Lithuanians. Inherited patriotism was stronger than any lure of world's paradise.

The Communists thought that we Poles would take the Red side and strengthen the ranks of International Communism, since we had been another nation oppressed by tyranny. But they had forgotten that every Pole had in his heart the long cherished idea of the Fatherland—Poland above all. The Poles had studied their national history, not from cold text-books, but in their homes in the evenings from smuggled books, which were forbidden and therefore precious, from the talks of mothers and fathers and grandfathers who had taken part in the 1860 insurrection, and had suffered beatings and exile to Siberia. Above everything, they were attached to Poland and to the idea of Polish in-

dependence, peasants and landowners, poor and rich alike. Even the children in 1905 had struck in the schools, refusing to say morning prayers in Russian. They were whipped and punished.

My aunt had six boys . . . in 1906 three emigrated, one to Germany, two to Austria—the youngest three remained in Russia. In the war the six served in the different armies. Many families were like that. Poland was crowded, and many Poles were forced to move into Russia. As individuals they found the Russians amiable and friendly. But to make a career and succeed was a different matter. Our Colonel had spent his life in the service of the Russian imperial army. If he hadn't been a Pole and a Roman Catholic, he would undoubtedly by this time have been a general. At the military school I had had the highest marks in practise and theory. For this I was supposed to be made sergeant of the squadron, but as a Pole I was given second place. The Russian boy who had the second highest marks was made sergeant. Yet on the whole, the Poles did not feel that they suffered as individuals. Much more painfully they felt the bondage and loss of freedom of their country.

Most of those in our regiment willingly served the Russian imperial army because of the promise that if the Allies won, Poland would be free. The Kerensky government was vague and indecisive on the subject. The promises and the ideas of the Communists were even more remote. The idea of Fatherland was entirely absent from Communistic slogans. But without the dream of Poland, their mother country, free and independent, the Poles of my generation did not exist. So now, when the Communists said that the troubles of both Russia and Poland came from the same source, the lancers did not choose to listen.

After a long talk, the Communist would usually wind up with, "Don't you want to be on the right side?"

The lancer would reply, "Yes, but Poland is my right side. The only thing I want to do is to go back to Poland. Once I'm there I'll see what is right or wrong . . . not before. You can't tell me what is wrong with my home—with my people—I have to find out for myself."

"Yes, but don't you understand . . . " the Communist would plead. "Your Polish landowners, factory owners, bankers, will establish another capitalistic state with a dummy king or a dummy parliament, just to cover the same old tyranny. Do you want to go back to the same state of affairs as those which resulted from the rule of tyrant Emperors of all the Russias?"

The lancer, with typical peasant stubbornness, would say:

"Yes, the Russian Emperor was a tyrant—but Polish kings—that's different. In our whole history there wasn't a single one who was a tyrant—we wouldn't let him be one. Our kings were elected."

Historically they were right; any member of the Senate could get up and veto any proposition coming from anybody, including the king. Historians say that this was the reason for Poland's downfall. True enough. But a Polish proverb says: "Perched on my fence, I'm the Governor's equal." That feeling of freedom and independence, whether based on any reality or not, was deeply rooted in Poles of every class and social standing. Love of freedom in Poland was an inherited ideal, and a part of the political credo in individual and communal life.

The Communists tried to work on the lancers from another angle, to alienate the privates from their officers. The officers were of the ruling classes. They were "White Hands." A despicable thing. A white hand can never understand a calloused hand. Only a calloused hand could be the hand of a comrade.

But between White Hands and Calloused Hands the

Polish language itself indicates an equality. In Poland everybody calls everybody "sir." In Polish one addresses a cook as "sir cook" and a waiter as "sir waiter." To the lancer I was "sir lieutenant," and to me he was "sir lancer." In the hardships of war, he did not think I was any better than he, and I did not think he was any worse than I. That feeling would have been less pronounced in time of peace and social activities. But now? We were all Poles and we all had dirty calloused hands—the soap was rather scarce. So the White-Hand idea was not successful either.

Naturally, among the lancers, there were a few from the cities, who were workers in the factories. They understood the Communists; they knew the ten-hour working day; they knew profiteering; they knew the injustices of capitalism. They saw that in our little unit of two hundred people they were in a small minority. And they disappeared gradually one after another. Altogether in that period we lost about fifteen Polish Communists, and nobody tried to find them. Their absence did not make a great change.

Among the Russians, the Communists were growing in power like a wild fire. Russian soldiers were fraternizing with the Germans and Austrians, holding meetings and discussions. Thus the army fell off piece by piece. A unit of Russian troops would come to the village, and in three or four days all that was left of that unit was a few officers. The soldiers had all gone home and taken their rifles with them.

We knew all the Communists and agitators by sight. After they failed with our boys they still remained friendly with us. Many of them were idealists, and these were in deadly fear of the rest who were a merciless, cruel and fanatic lot. These fanatics started to make our lives uncomfortable. Their motto was, "Who is not with us is against us." They were annoyed by our presence. Lonely,

bewildered Russian officers would gather around us, ask us to take them into our unit, and would stay for days, as if we were their rock of salvation in the turbulent stream. The Communists knew this and watched us sharply.

But we appeared calm and quiet. We did not intend to enter their fight. So, with the full knowledge of our lancers, we held meetings at night and sent out scouts to the Germans, to the Austrians, into Poland, to Moscow and Petersburg. They all came back, with the exception of one who had been sent to Germany. The news they brought was not hopeful.

The Austrian situation was the most favorable for the Poles; the Roman empire was in pieces; Polish legions were forming quickly and were gathering in Galitzia and in Russian Poland. But we could not reach them because behind the lines the Germans were holding an impregnable iron wall of military police. They were cleverly smuggling everybody and everything they wanted to into the Russian army, but they would not allow one person from the Russian side inside their own zone of occupation. Our information was that they would not let us go through the lines, even if we laid down our arms.

From Moscow and Petersburg word came of hunger and a general exodus of the intelligentsia and the Whites to the south. There a sort of natural concentration of the White forces started.

Our situation was serious. There was no way to go, and no place at which to aim. The Austrian front seemed nearest. Perhaps we could find there the section of the front which was occupied by Austrian Polish Legionnaires. They would let us through. We could join them. But to get there we would have to cover two or three hundred miles through rebellious country, full of wild and loose peasants and soldiers, who, for the first time in their lives, were

tasting freedom, and were drunk on it. "Who is not with us is against us"—two hundred of us against thousands of them.

Then we made a mistake. We allowed four White Russian officers to stay with our unit. We knew them personally. One, Alec Gutcheil, had been my chum at military school. They had opposed the Reds, and the Reds were after them. If caught, they would be killed. The Communists learned where they were and asked us to give them up. The Colonel refused and said he knew nothing about them. He really did not know, because we had been hiding them. But a rumpus started. In a few days we heard that the Reds intended to appear with a section of machine-guns and to demand the surrender of these officers.

It was time for us to go. In one hour the two hundred men took as much provision and as much munitions as they and their horses could carry. At midnight we silently moved out toward the west.

Hiding, we moved mostly at night. We cut the telephone wires wherever we could. We took off our insignia so that people would not know what troops we were. Like foxes, we smoothed our tracks. We talked little, and in whispers.

Two hundred men and two hundred horses in a resentful country. The peasants suspicious. Almost always we had to take by force what we wanted, without paying, helping ourselves freely to what we needed. The troops we met paid no attention to us. During the day we were like thousands of other soldiers, resting somewhere in the hills, or by the road. Who could tell where we were going? If we were asked, the cunning lancers always had some sort of answer. We would move five miles south and then turn two miles west, and then swerve back ten miles to the north, and again a few miles south, and at last once more three miles west.

If we had to take provisions from a village we made sure to tap the telephone wires and to leave as soon as possible in one direction, and then after the village had lost sight of us we turned immediately in another direction.

But we never heard that anybody noticed us. We just disappeared and no one pursued. In a way we were helping to disorganize the army and the country, which, at the moment, was the only thing the Communists wanted.

We soon learned how to obtain provisions with less danger and trouble. When we appeared in a town or village, in marching formation, as a regular unit, the peasants closed everything against us. Our appearance of order meant a continuation of the war. Then we began to send a dozen lancers with their uniforms unbuttoned, caps on the backs of their necks. Stray individuals and disorderly, marching somewhere south or west, they would say to the peasants:

"I have had enough fighting—I am going home."

Ten or twelve of them would bring enough provisions for a hundred men.

The lancers were good actors. They loved to play at this pretense, and then would joke about being the best Communists in the world.

And this was also the surest way to scout, and to learn what was going on in the towns. If many troops were concentrated in a place, if they were settling their political opinions, we turned around as quietly as we could, and in spite of weariness and hunger, we looked for another less populated place.

XXI

COLONEL'S END

THREE miles ahead we expected to find a small village where we might get some food for the following day. The Colonel and Lieutenant Gran rode ahead to reconnoiter. It was a clear September day, mellow and fresh. We were on a side-road that ran through a forest of young pines, and we waited all day there in the forest of seedlings waiting for the Colonel and Gran. We waited until eight o'clock.

They did not come back. As the darkness sifted through the uneasy trees suspicion sifted into our minds. Major Var took command and decided to scout around the village to find Gran and the Colonel.

He took six men with him, and they went on foot. In about an hour they returned with word that in the village the peasants had said that two men—an elderly one and a young one—had passed through and proceeded on the road to the east. It sounded queer because we knew that our direction was straight south, but we believed them and moved on toward the pointed direction.

We rode through the village at about ten o'clock at night, a time when every one should have been asleep and everything dark. But fires were burning in a number of houses, and dark figures stood in the shadows watching us pass. I did not pay much attention to this at the time.

We turned on to the road going east, and in about an hour we reached another small village. Not a sign of the Colonel and Gran. They certainly would have waited for us. Doubt turned to alarm. We left a few men, giving them

strict orders not to move, and not to disclose their presence to any one. We rode swiftly back and took the road leading south.

The moon by this time was full, and the country looked peaceful, but ghostly, with long shadows of sand-hills and tall pines. We became more and more worried with each step. For many miles we trotted and galloped on the sandy road. There was not a trace of the Colonel. The Major called a council. He included a few sergeants, old soldiers. They knew guerrilla warfare and how to follow traces. We decided to go back to the first village. Once again we would approach it from the side of the forest where the Colonel had left us. We sent scouts to listen because the sergeants said they didn't like the looks of the village. Something was wrong there.

Silently and grimly, we then galloped back across the fields and bushes. When we reached the forest we went through without a road, judging our direction only by the moon, which was blinking through the branches and around the tree-trunks.

Suddenly we heard the neighing of a horse. Two or three of our horses answered in spite of our efforts to quiet them. The horses were trained, and in ordinary conditions they would not neigh.

We were full of hope. Undoubtedly it was either the Colonel's or Gran's horse, and our horses recognized it. We continued to move. The neighing came nearer. Suddenly the Colonel's honey-colored horse ran out from among the trees and took her place at the head of the little group.

There was no Colonel on her. No saddle, and the reins were broken. The horse had freed herself from the post or tree to which she had been tied.

Again a council. We huddled together. The lancers were around us, listening attentively. The youngsters

wanted to go at once to the village and search every house. The older ones said, "No, the peasants will run away and you never can find them in the forest." One of the sergeants proposed a plan.

The plan was to move quietly in single file, surround the village, wait until daylight, and then one platoon with officers should enter the village and demand an explanation.

It was a long dreary wait. We were close to the village. The dogs scented us, and barked all night long. The horses nipped the grass, and chewed the bark of the trees. We could smell the smoke from the village chimneys. Where the forest was not so dense we could see the houses. We waited. Grudgingly, the hours gave up the minutes. We smoked and thought of the Colonel and of Gran. A blanket of fear smothered voices and movements. We waited.

In the morning we entered the village from all sides, and at once. We herded everybody out into the street, about a hundred and fifty people in a mass, and then proceeded to search house after house, barn after barn, and pig-sty after pig-sty.

In front of one house some of the men found a few very vague traces of narrow-toed shoes. Peasants did not wear them. We were certain that these had come from the boots of the Colonel or Gran.

I was standing by a group of peasants, women and children. Some of the men were in soldiers' uniforms. They had belonged to the army which had gone home. Each one of them was rigid with fear and tense animal expectation.

Even the children were quiet. They did not smile, did not laugh, did not cry. I tried to talk, and gave a few lumps of sugar to the children, but the crowd stood in silence.

At last the Major and a few soldiers came rushing down the street, straight toward the group of peasants, yelling:

"Whose house is this? The fourth from the corner?"

There was no answer.

The Major drew out his saber, and in a hysterical voice, again yelled:

"Whose house? Answer or I'll chop down all of you."

In a calm, far-away voice, somebody answered, "He ran away."

I moved toward the house, the fourth one from the corner. As I walked away I heard the Major commanding the women to separate from the men. "You men! Line up in a row on the other side of the street."

I went over to the house, through the little orchard in front, and then through the broken fence into the back yard. Under the wall, by the barn, there was a huge heap of manure, which the lancers were digging up with pitchforks, with the sheaths of their sabers, with their rifles, with their hands.

They were cursing madly. In front of the heap of manure, lay the bloody corpse of the Colonel. It was pitted with dozens of small round bloody spots. The lancers were now digging up the body of Gran, which had been buried deeper in the manure.

They had both been killed with pitchforks, hay-forks and blows on the head.

I cried. With my face wet, not knowing what to do, I wandered into the house, out of the house, and down the street as if to leave that village—to get away. Then I turned around and came back. I returned to the place where the Major, and by that time the rest of the lancers, had assembled.

The Major, his gun in his hand, was facing a single file of about fifty peasants. He spoke to the first, a bald shabby man with red winking eyes and sparse grayish beard. The Major asked, "Who killed him?"

The man could hardly speak from fear. "I don't know . . ." and did not finish the sentence.

Var shot him straight in the face.

He turned to the next one. The man fell on his knees. He wore a soldier's infantry overcoat.

"I didn't, your Honor," he cried, still on his knees. Var shot him in the head, and he fell with his face down on the road.

By this time the women and children were screaming hysterically, crying, trying to get away, or throwing themselves on the ground. The lancers, with sabers and rifles, were holding them. A few of them they hit. The children broke away and rushed into the houses. The men lined up, tried to move and began to shout, but the lancers in front and back of them held their rifles aimed at them, and the Sergeant said in a loud voice:

"Hold on—back. If any one moves I'll fire into all of you."

Hysteria was getting hold of me. I moved from one group to another, took out my gun and wanted to empty it into somebody. In the pandemonium a few voices rose above the others:

"It's him who started it."

A man was shoved out from the line. Var jumped at the man and quietly asked him if he had done it. The man did not answer. With unblinking eyes he looked above the Major's head, into the horizon.

With gun in his hand, Var threw himself on the man, and with his bare hands and the butt of the gun hit him, scratched and kicked him again, and again, and again. . . . The man was tall and thin, and Var was a small fellow, weighing about one hundred and forty pounds. But in his fury he knocked him down and trampled on him. The man was not defending himself. He was only covering his face.

By this time the crowd was silent, and watched without a motion. Var, still bent over the gray form of the man, emptied three or four shells into his stomach. He then threw the empty gun into the man's face, and went away. He leaned against the wall and sobbed or panted—I don't know which.

In a businesslike manner, the old Sergeant went along the line of peasants and pulled out every fifth man, counting them with his fingers. He ordered a platoon to take them behind the row of houses and shoot them. In a short while we heard regular salvos, twelve times. Twelve men had been shot. Everybody was standing motionless.

We put the bodies of the Colonel and Gran on a small wagon.

Then each house was set afire separately, and when the whole village was burning like a pile of wood, we moved swiftly away.

XXII

HIDING IN THE FORESTS

We found ourselves at war with the country which we had defended for four years. The burning of the village and the executions had not passed unnoticed. The news spread, the authorities questioned refugees from the village. Orders were given to locate "a band which hides in the forest, travels at night, and which is not an officers' unit. They are not Communists either. They are hard to identify because the men in the band are Calloused Hands, and sometimes they seem to be friendly."

We tried to be friendly, to say the least. Once or twice we helped people in remote villages with our surplus supplies. To a horseless hamlet we gave a number of horses. Another time we repaired a bridge. Our Doctor, who had by now lost even his shreds of faith in medicine, left our ambulance cart with medicinal supplies in a village that had been stricken with an epidemic of influenza. The only things he kept were bicarbonate of soda, castor oil, iodine and his veterinary kit.

All that did not make our lives safer or easier; and it did not bring us any nearer to our goal—Poland. Several times we managed to reach within five miles of the Austrian lines—only an hour's stiff walk. But the scouts we sent returned and told us that it was impossible to break through. They said the lines were held either by Hungarian troops hostile to Poles, by Russians entirely in the hands of Communists, or by Germans who sternly refused even to negotiate.

Sad, magnificent, red autumn was in full swing. The

nights were cold, the days still warm. In the mornings the earth was steaming, and falling leaves were already covering it with a ruddy blanket for a long winter sleep. For days, sometimes for weeks, we did not take off our clothes. We did not wash or shave, and were all sunburned and wind-burned. Often we were hungry and sick, but always alert. We played with danger, like a clever animal that runs away from a stupid hunter, using every possible loophole, evades him, and then watches the hunter disappear in the distance.

The forests, populated only by other bands hiding just as we were, saved us many times. All the lancers were excellent outdoor men and trappers. The guerrilla warfare was a picnic to them.

Moving at night through the trees we would hear a suspicious noise two or three miles ahead, disperse silently to the right and to the left of the road and wait while some military unit or unknown band, also trying to be unseen, passed. Two hundred of us with horses stood twenty-five or fifty yards from the road, with our caps over the horses' mouths, and not a sound betrayed us. Not a spur clinked. Strangers along the road did not suspect that two hundred pairs of eyes were watching them. After they had disappeared we silently continued in the opposite direction.

But we had to be careful. Wherever we moved we had scouts ahead, behind, to the left and to the right. Warned by the dark experience of the Colonel and Gran, the scouts were well disguised and careful.

Major Var was now our commanding officer, but only nominally—for nobody could replace the old Colonel, or take his spirit away from us. More so because his Daisy, a honey-colored horse, was still with us, rarely used, but fed, cleaned and watched as if the Colonel were alive. Looking

at her, we expected any moment that the Colonel would appear, give her a lump of sugar or handful of oats, mount and move slowly at his place ahead of all of us. But he was gone for ever, and we seldom even talked about him. Now and then, during a council or argument, a lancer asked his officer, "Sir Lieutenant, what do you think Sir Colonel would do if he were alive?" And the Lieutenant had to think hard to make the lancer believe that he was making the right answer. Or, when a lancer slackened in vigilance or in the care of his horse, the officer, after the usual reprimand, needed only to wind up with, "Do you think, Sir Lancer, that Sir Colonel would stand for that kind of discipline?"

Major Var took part in this adoration, and never considered himself fully in command of the regiment. On such orders as he signed he always wrote: "Major Var—Temporary Commanding Officer."

And so the regiment continued its little private affairs of war and life as if nothing had been changed in our military routine. Only one man showed a deep change since we had lost the Colonel and started our wanderings. That was Doctor Kraj. He had always been deaf or had pretended to be. Now he hardly spoke or listened to anybody. He became passive, uninterested, a solitary old man. The Colonel's death had plunged him into a sort of prostration.

He regarded his own profession with contempt. The few simple drugs left after we gave away the ambulance were for him a complete pharmacopœia. He always said that the sight of blood disgusted him and spoiled his appetite. He never looked at a wound if he could help it. Instead he asked the sick man what was the matter with him and relied on that self-diagnosis. Every wounded man likes to take off his bandages and show his wounds. But Doctor Kraj would hold up his hand and say, "No, no, no, keep it

covered. I don't want to see it, and I know it hurts. I know everything about it. Let him hear all about it," and he would point to his assistant. His diagnosis was always the same. "My boy, if you want to get well in due time——" Here he would pause, bite his mustache, and finally wind up, "It certainly looks bad for you." If the poor suffering soldier then asked, "What shall I do, Doctor, to get well in due time?" his answer was invariably, "Just rest, my boy, and enjoy the God-damned kindness of the Red Cross."

How had he become a doctor? Nobody ever knew, but certainly he must have had a medical degree to occupy the position of chief doctor to a division. He had a huge number of friends, and probably through them he managed to be assigned always to our regiment. His assistants did the work in all the rest of the division. I never knew him to perform even the simplest operation. Some one asked him, "Doc, what will you do when you get wounded or sick yourself?" to which he answered "I certainly won't be a God-forsaken dumb-bell and ask any son of a bitch of a medical charlatan to my bedside!" He could not make the simplest or pleasantest remark without cursing. Always of a complaining nature, he was now in a continuous rage with himself, with the lancers, with the Germans, with the whole universe. His laziness was a stock joke, and the slyness he exercised to make others wait on him was the only indication that he had a shrewd mind.

One morning the Doctor sat in front of his little tent, just large enough to hold his cot, folding chair and medicine-case, which would by this time have been pretty empty if it hadn't been for a few quarts of brandy. He sprawled comfortably on three or four boxes arranged to form an easy chair, dressed only in his nightgown, with his military overcoat hanging over his shoulders. His bare legs were resting on a saddle turned upside down. Before him stood

an empty half-gallon kettle, which had been full of porridge a few minutes before, and the Doctor was finishing a chunk of bread spread with a piece of raw bacon, making a sandwich two and a half inches thick. On a smaller box stood a canteen with some sort of drink. It was within easy reach of his arm.

In front of the tent two lances were stuck in the ground, a string tied between them, and on the string, fluttering in the wind, were the Doctor's shirt, underwear, pants, socks and boots. It was early morning. Alec Gutcheil, Chmiel and I were examining the horses when we heard the Doctor's bellowing voice calling his orderly:

"Ian! Ian! Where are you? Son of your own mother—Ian——" There was no answer. Ian had been assigned on regular scouting duty for forage and food, and had left the camp the previous evening.

"Ian!" yelled the Doctor with such force that the echo was repeated through the forest . . . *Ian* . . . *Ian* . . . *Ian* . . . until the call died in the distance. It was my day on duty, so I considered it necessary to approach the Doctor and explain to him why Ian was absent.

"Besides," I continued, "you don't want everybody for five miles around to know we're camping here, do you, Doc?"

"I don't care," he grunted.

"Yes you do, Doc. You'd hate to be captured without your pants and boots—just as you are."

"Well, they're hanging right next you. See if the damned things are dry," he said nonchalantly.

I touched them. "Dry and crisp."

"Don't kid me," he grunted again. "I'm sure they're wet; it rained all day yesterday."

"Oh, rot!" I exclaimed, and threw his pants at him. "Look for yourself."

The Doctor caught them in the air. He didn't even look at them, but with a little yawn, said good-naturedly, "Now, be a good boy and hand me the rest of my clothes."

I felt like a fool. "Do you mean to say you were hollering for Ian just to give you your clothes? And here they are, exactly five yards away from you? You're a lazy old mushroom, Doc, that's what you are. I gave you your pants, but you'll get up and get the rest. . . . And what's more, I'll tell every lancer not to hand them to you."

"Oh, don't be a pig. Look here, I'm an old man. I could be your father. . . . I'm sick and tired. Can't you oblige a sick man?"

"Sick? What ails you?"

"About everything—come on, give me the rest of my clothes."

"I can't, Doc," I said. "I'm on duty and have to watch the camp. I can't waste time nursing old cripples." And I started off. Doc threw his empty kettle after me.

"Come back, you bum—you milk sucker. I'll give you something."

"Never mind giving me something," I answered. "This is for throwing the kettle." I grabbed the Doctor's belongings and hung them around in different places—all over the camp, paying not the slightest attention to his protests.

Then I ran to Alec, Chmiel and the rest of the boys with the story. We decided to warn everybody, and see what he would do.

Well, he sat that day until four o'clock, until his orderly came back, without moving from his comfortable seat in the warm sun, smoking his pipe and calling everybody all sorts of names—mostly unmentionable—for not helping an old and sick man by handing him his boots and underwear. When his orderly arrived the Doctor complained bitterly to him. Ian, a sly, short, stout peasant with an innate hatred

for suffering, was as devoted to Kraj as a dog. He shared his dislike of medical science, too, but quite definitely included hygiene as the chief enemy of mankind. Accordingly, his dirt was remarkable. He unloaded pockets full of apples that he had brought to his beloved "Sir Doctor," listened to his complaints and muttered his disapproval. He collected all the Doctor's things, and dressed him as though he were a child; buttoned his shirt, put on his boots.

For the rest of the day Doctor Kraj walked around gloomy and stern, without saying a word. In spite of his weariness, Ian followed him around like a puppy. When dinner-time came they both went to the field kitchen. The cook was making a tempting soup of lamb meat stock, with potatoes and carrots. Everything was fresh and had just been brought in by the scouting party, of which the Doctor's orderly had been a member.

Sniffing, the Doctor said: "Fill up my kettle now. I'm going to dine early and go to bed—I'm tired."

The cook, knowing about the Doctor's work on this particular day, smiled secretly, and filled up the Doctor's kettle. Silently, Ian handed in his and it also was returned to him full of the steaming stew.

The Doctor tried the soup, and made a face. "That isn't good—not a speck of salt. Wait, let me salt it." The unsuspecting cook handed him a box of salt. The Doctor pretended to take a handful of salt and sprinkle it into the boiling aromatic soup in the big field kitchen kettle. Instead, he poured in a handful of calomel from his veterinary kit, which he had held in his hand all the time. A teaspoonful was considered a large dose for a horse. He stirred the soup well with a large wooden spoon, and quietly left the kitchen, followed by Ian carrying both their kettles.

Not a single soul in the whole camp slept that night.

Groans and curses were heard everywhere. Dark figures wandered back and forth desperately, trying to adjust their pants on the run, and stumbling over other dark figures that were squatted on the ground. The cook himself suffered agony, doubly so because between groans every one asked him, "What was the matter with that bloody soup of yours?" Worst of all, we could not locate the Doctor at all that night. He took his orderly with him, hid in the bushes about three hundred yards from the camp, and spent the night peacefully, wrapped up in all the blankets he owned.

XXIII

THE OLD SWITCHMAN

THE regiment was camped in the center of a young forest about two square miles in size, a remnant of virgin timber. About twenty-five years ago it had been exploited, trees cut, charcoal burned, tar extracted, the under-bark which is used for peasants' woven shoes tied in bundles and taken away. One could see traces of those activities under young underbrush, seedlings and tall slim baby birches, oaks, pines, ash trees and aspens. Now and then the half-rotted trunk of a giant, four or five feet in diameter, held its weather-beaten face toward the sky—and all around him the shoots sprouted and stood by—as if they were the young Knights of the Round Table gathered together to guard the grave of their founder and leader. They clung upright and impertinent—holding on with their strong young roots to the soil around the trunk and intermingling their branches, as though holding hands and dancing an eternal stationary war dance of the forest.

Young, but already solemn and somber, stubbornly resisting every gust of wind, they were mostly oaks and pines. Around them the scum of the woods—aspens, ash trees, willow bushes, weeds and ferns, led their attack and abuse. Aspens were especially aggressive. They grew from seeds scattered by wind and rain everywhere, in clearings, in dense shade among the roots of other trees, right on the top of uprooted old logs and in small furrows made by yesteryear's rains and snow. They spread their branches in every direction and the slightest breeze made them shake and

tremble as if their last day were coming. That peculiar dance of small aspen leaves was so pronounced and infectious that when we quietly cut through to the depths of the forest, we could not resist the feeling of entering and cutting through something alive and responsive. It was like walking on quicksilver or through a crowd of midgets who never stopped laughing—who were shaking their bodies in terrified, spasmodic laughter—endless, constant and alive. Sometimes they all shook at once and evenly. Sometimes they bent the tops of their branches to the left or right—just as a crowd, watching the clown, bends roaring with belly screams when his joke is particularly good. Or now and then suddenly, the aspens would drop all their branches down to the earth and shake—shake even more vigorously—like servants who chuckle at their masters' jokes but do not dare to laugh aloud. Dark green baby oak trees and pines gazed at those silvery gray little devils of aspens and scarcely turned their leaves—as if not wanting to be annoyed by commoners. Wiggling, shaking, common busybodies. That's what they were.

Right in the center of these woods was an old camp abandoned by charcoal burners and tar extractors. Several dilapidated shacks and low barns remained. Under a few large pines that were still alive it was cool and shady. Just the place for horses. The men occupied the shacks. The one dirt road, branching off the highway, was obviously not used at all. That promised safety, and we decided to stay here for at least two days—to rest and clean ourselves a bit. Fortunately, the water in an old well was both good and cold. But we had to be careful and on the lookout. I was ordered to scout. Alec Gutcheil, the Russian officer who found refuge and stayed with us through all our wanderings, went with me.

We started out on foot at about four in the morning.

Carbines hung behind our backs, coats were unbuttoned, caps on our necks, and all officer's insignia carefully destroyed. We looked exactly like two ordinary privates who had "finished with war" and were headed home to enjoy freedom. Thousands like that were roaming on all the roads and highways. In about an hour, while it was still dark, we came to a railroad track. It ran straight west. Alongside it we found a dirt road, or rather two deep wheel tracks. Next to the solid straight railroad tracks, bound and led by steel railings, this dirt road was like a little drunken man, dragged along by the side of a well-disciplined big policeman. The dirt road swayed and swerved—fell down and climbed up—jerked to the right or to the left, suddenly went at an angle—stepped politely aside for an old dead tree—then suddenly ran amuck across a huge puddle of water, but nevertheless always clung to the railroad tracks, following them obediently and respectfully. The railroad tracks, like good sober policemen, never changed their direction. Straight and straight they went, as far as the eye could see, dragging the dirt road with them, in spite of its crazy frolics. We decided to follow the dirt road, and by eight o'clock had covered about ten miles of it without discovering anything of importance.

A train passed us going west toward the front. We could not see whether it was empty or loaded. We were down below the embankment, and the train ran very fast and disappeared swiftly. But a few trains came toward us, away from the front. These were loaded with people. We saw shadows in the windows and through the open doors of the carriages, silhouettes of people sitting on the floor. We saw figures of people lying on the roofs of the carriages and squatting on the steps. A few even stood on the couplings. The last train was particularly over-loaded. It was moving slowly. Soldiers sang and played and shouted to us. One,

who sat on a pile of wood in the tender of the locomotive, threw a piece of the wood at us, laughing heartily. Alec picked up a stone and threw it back. The soldier waved his hands, got up and made an improper gesture. His comrades roared and laughed and waved their hands. The army was going home. They were happy and joyful as colts.

The train was disappearing. We walked without changing our pace and Alec started to think aloud:

"They are all so stupidly happy—so silly, joyous. Like children between lessons. It drives me mad. It takes the anger out of me. They probably don't think—they don't realize that they are deserters—traitors—low scum. Probably it never enters their heads. Sort of suspended existence. A vacation between ordeals—that's what it is. The war was one ordeal. An ordeal for the highest aim of civilization. But they broke it—cowards—they betrayed it, and they won't escape punishment. The next ordeal will surely come—as certain as the sun will come up to-morrow. And it will be a vengeance. They don't know about it at all and I don't know what it will be, but it will come suddenly, like thunder—the vengeance of history it will be . . . swift and horrible. . . ."

I liked Alec very much—liked his seriousness and kindness—courage and culture. He was a wonderful comrade. In the cavalry school our beds had been next to each other—and often when one of us was on duty in the dormitory he would come and wake the other up and spend two long hours of the winter night chatting in whispers. When we were graduated we were close friends. We hadn't seen each other since—and now we were together again—and gradually resurrecting our old friendship—talks and silences. I thought over his words—and tried to answer them right.

"Get down off your high horse, Alec. Forget about the

vengeance of history, tradition, civilization and all that nonsense. Ordeals do exist—just as happiness exists, because the only eternal law of life is the law of contrasts. Good exists because bad contrasts it. Light because shadow outlines it. Valleys because the mountains guard them.

"And whatever we choose to see and recognize is our next destiny. The ordeal won't come of its own accord, Alec. The people themselves, the individuals and the masses, will choose their next big ordeal. They are on the verge of its creation now. That is the only history and process of human life—to create a dream and plunge into an ordeal for its realization.

"People dream and then strive for the fulfillment of their dreams. While in the period of dreaming, people are always happy and joyous. A dream always looks so pure and beautiful and right. When it comes to the realizations or materializations of dreams, people fight, suffer, die, and cut each other's throats. Can't you see that?

"You dreamed about the glory of the Empire, about the power of Russia. One day in school at maneuvers I remember you said: 'After this war Russia will be the greatest, richest and biggest state in the universe. Western culture and comfort will be open to us.' That was your dream. You were happy and joyous then. To realize and create this dream you went through the ordeal of war. The Revolution ended the materialization of your dream. Why? Because somebody's dream ripened enough for its realization. And another ordeal is about ready to begin. Unless you start to dream for yourself another dream, just as those free soldiers do, you won't be happy."

Alec took his cap off, pulled a gray handkerchief from its lining, and wiped the perspiration from his homely and serious young face. It feebly resembled Beethoven's idealized features, except that his hair was closely cropped and already gray in spots. He was only twenty-eight.

"Another dream? That isn't so easy. My old one has not materialized yet—even if I do accept your theory." He paused and walked in silence. "You lucky dogs, all of you," he started again in an even voice. "You have your Poland to dream about."

"Have I?" I thought. I did not know. Finally I said:

"In my heart I have that dream, in my mind, no. I can't explain it. I must be a freak. I'm immune to patriotism. At the same time I'm sentimental about it in others and in myself in spells. But I can't really say that my dream is to call this stretch of land or another my country and wish it to prosper more than any other land. After all, they are all alike, and they all have to prosper. My dream is in moving over those stretches from hill to hill, from valley to valley, from river to river and to worship them silently while I look at them. Then I begin to wonder again what is beyond the horizon? And this thought becomes my dream until I reach it. My dream is to measure the fields, forests, rivers and sea shores with my steps, and my ordeal is that I probably will never be able to stop and say, 'This is mine. This is for me. This is the best.' Even if I wanted to say it."

"Just an original 'Wandering Jew,' eh, father?" Alec laughed. "Where are your whiskers?"

I raised my hand to give him a good whack. He ran away and I chased after him. But he was faster than I. I went back to walking, when abruptly he stopped and pointed to the lonely figure of an old man who stood on the tracks facing the sun. He was praying, making the sign of the cross on his chest with a quick movement of his right hand. A tall man with broad shoulders, dressed in old dark gray pants and a homespun shirt, without a belt. His white hair was long and yellowish, as was his long curly beard. He was barefoot.

"Look at him. Leo Tolstoy in person," said Alec.

It was true. The old man could have doubled for Count Tolstoy any time. We came closer. He turned around, crossed his forehead and chest again and, showing glistening white teeth, smilingly said:

"How's your health, brothers? Where are you from and where are you going? How about a glass of tea and whatever else God created for our bellies' satisfaction?"

Now involuntarily we both smiled at the old man.

"All right," said I. "We have tea.—How about sugar? We cay pay," I added quickly—sugar was a rarity then.

The old man suddenly made a sour face.

"Pshaw—sugar—who wants sugar? Devil's invention—hard, white, sickly stuff. Honey, brother—soft, golden, sweet honey. That's what I'll give you with tea—honey. And no middleman either. Straight from God to me—yes, brothers—straight. Look at my stores," he laughed—and he pointed to three beehives right next the road. "Come inside.—Come inside, brothers."

He continued to chatter and led us inside, into the lonely house of a switchman at a railroad crossing. Here in one large room with a counter and a little kitchen, he kept a little store and a sort of tea house. I suppose he slept behind the huge oven which occupied the center of the room. We sat down and he asked us who we were.

We told him we were cavalry soldiers going home to Odessa. He gave us tea, honey and home-made jam, together with real bread which he had baked himself only the day before. We sat enjoying these delicacies, listening to his chatter—which never stopped for a minute. While he was talking with a deep basso voice, he kept smiling all the time, his large black eyes suddenly disappearing behind hairy white eyebrows.

He had an odd way of laughing, wrinkling his nose and lowering his eyebrows over his eyes, covering them en-

tirely. His face then looked mischievous and sly. When he was serious, which wasn't often, he was a kind parchment-colored image of a saint from an old ikon.

He was a widower, all alone. His children were scattered about the world, and except for a couple of dogs and cats, and a few sparrows that were flying free around the room, not without certain unpoetic traces of their presence, there was not a soul around him. But he was happy. He had everything he needed.

"Reds, Greens and Whites all pass by here," he said. "Nobody has taken anything from me. First of all, there isn't much to take. And then, people like to listen to me talk, and when they listen they forget to take anything." And he chuckled shrewdly, covering his mouth with a huge saucer of hot tea.

He hadn't been getting any salary for some time, but for his own satisfaction, he continued his job of switchman as well as he could, taking care of his section of track as if nothing had happened. Like most lonely men who worship nature, he was indifferent to social and political actions. The Revolution passed by him as a parade passes before a man at a good spot on the sidewalk. It left him untouched and it brought him enormous entertainment.

As we sat there burst upon our ears singing and loud talk, and the sound of approaching horses and wagons. We caught up our carbines and looked through the window.

The old man opened the door and stood on the threshold: "What in God's name is this?" he exclaimed.

We couldn't see much through the small dusty windows so we also went to the door, still holding our carbines. He glanced at them.

"Don't worry, brothers. They're common people—peaceful—women among them—clergy too. But what is it. I ask you?" He turned to me.

"How do I know? It looks like a traveling nunnery."

By this time we had got a clear view of the procession. Along the road were coming six wagons, one behind the other. The first wagon stopped in front of the house. In it were two Red infantry privates and two girls. The two soldiers got up and stood on the seat, waving their hands and shouting to the other wagons, telling them to go on with their journey. At their feet the two young girls sat watching them. But the second wagon, instead of going on, stopped also. Down from it jumped a meager-looking Jewish boy with a thin red nose. He looked about eighteen years old, his flimsy tall figure dressed in civilian clothes and hung about with cartridge belts, rifle and guns. In a falsetto voice, he ordered the rest of the wagons to stop also. In them were two elderly nuns, an old Orthodox Russian priest and his wife and sixteen girls in the uniforms of a parish school—altogether an extraordinary collection.

"Let's see—let's see," chuckled the old switchman. "This is something new."

We left our carbines inside and came closer.

The two soldiers got down from the wagon, together with the two girls, who began to giggle. The Jewish boy dashed up to them, and began to protest excitedly. The soldiers helping the two girls, chattering and laughing loudly, paid no attention. Like a young rooster, the little fellow looked up at the tall soldiers and the buxom girls, and shouted:

"I forbid you to do it—I forbid—you can't do it. . . ."

One of the soldiers spat to the side, and said:

"Oh, go to hell!"

We asked the priest what all this meant. The old tiny bit of man in dark gray robes told us in a trembling voice that the eighteen girls came from a small convent whose school building had been requisitioned. They were being moved into the town parish school. The two soldiers had

been appointed to guard them on their way, and the little Jewish boy was a Political Commissioner who was in command of the transfer. But all the way down from the convent the two soldiers had drunk continuously from a large bottle of home-made liquor, mixing the drinks with black bread, onions and pickles.

"And could you believe it," the old priest concluded, "they made the girls drink too—and now they've stopped and I . . . I . . . don't know what they want—ask the Jew—he is the boss now—he knows. Oh, God Almighty, the Jew is the boss." And he crossed himself. "Awful times—awful times have come upon us."

We moved toward the boy and the soldiers, the whole crowd following us and forming a circle around the first wagon. Out of the slow grumbling voices of the soldiers and the staccato accusations of the Jewish boy, we got the story. The fresh air, the alcohol and the plump, homely, healthy girls had brought the two soldiers into an acquisitive mood. They decided that they would stay for a while in this lonely house with the two girls. The rest, under the protection of the Political Commissioner, could go ahead. In no time the soldiers and the girls would catch up with them. In other words, what they wanted was a quiet, undisturbed, mutually agreed upon rape.

The Commissioner was beside himself. His large blue eyes with their light pink eyelashes, glared out of his massed freckles, he waved his hands and talked without a pause. Over the regular military outfit he wore a big black civilian topcoat. He looked like an overgrown boy scout in his father's old overcoat. From his speech he was an "intellectual." But all his revolutionary education was falling to pieces before the stubbornness of these two single-minded privates.

Nevertheless he tried to shame them. "Bloodthirsty

gendarmes of the Emperor could do such things, but not the comrades of the great bloodless Revolution!"

One of the soldiers answered indignantly, "Did you do that Revolution or did we? We did it," he shouted, without waiting for an answer. "We—with these calloused hands. So, Comrade, shut up," and he turned away.

The Commissioner grabbed him by the shoulder. He begged, pleaded, talked about the Communistic and Socialistic conscience, ran around the wagon, waved his guns—all in vain. The soldiers, drunk and energetic, would not listen. They continued to unload their liquor, food, knapsacks . . . and the girls.

The Jewish boy came close to one of the soldiers and shouted in his face: "Don't you understand! It's brutal. It's dirty. What you mean to do."

The soldier, chewing an onion, with drunken seriousness, took the Commissioner's hand and said, "Comrade, the people are for the people . . . see. . . . You ought to understand that—you're an educated man. The girls are the people . . . they like us. We are the people. We like them. Why shouldn't we enjoy ourselves?"

"You're talking rot. They were entrusted to you on your honor—on the honor of a Red soldier."

"True. We won't abuse the honor of a Red soldier. We will take the best care of them. How about it, girls?"

And laughing, he grabbed one of the girls and kissed her on the cheeks, the girl faintly defending herself.

The priest's wife screeched out, "Oh, my God . . ." and leaned her huge frame on the little old priest, who was crossing himself vigorously.

The Jewish boy, now in a helpless hysteria, moved away. Pointing his thin arm, shaking his finger at them and stamping his foot, all absurdly like a child at a game, but with a face of tense despair, he cried out:

"I will denounce you to the authorities. . . . You will answer for it. You will be shot for this."

With drunken abruptness, one of the soldiers changed his tone and, slowly turning his head, said:

"Shut up, you son of a bitch, you lousy Jew, you cursed scum, or I'll murder you right here on the spot."

Still hanging on to his girl, he started for the boy. The boy raised his gun. Then the two nuns, who up to now had been silently crying, ran quickly to the boy and hung on to his arms.

"Oh, please . . . please don't shoot. . . . Don't . . ." said the red-faced one, while the fat elderly nun, turning to the soldiers, whined in a nasal voice:

"Darling little doves, warriors of Christ, don't start bloodshed . . . don't shame the girls. Let them go . . . God Almighty will reward you. . . . Please let them go . . ." Not able to speak any more, she sobbed bitterly.

Touched by her tears, the soldiers tried to be sweet-faced and kindly, at the same time hugging the girls, who, still silent and bewildered, feebly tried to push their big red hands from their breasts.

The red-faced nun, encouraged by the girls' protests, started to pull one of them away. Immediately the soldier shifted the girl to his other side, and with the same sweet and lazy chuckle, slapped the nun on the behind, saying:

"Dear little Mother, don't get mixed up in our affairs, because if you do, we'll take off your skirts, spank you and make you walk naked into town." The red-faced nun grunted, and suddenly her face turned sugar-white.

We did not know what to do. We couldn't betray ourselves. In our anonymous state, we could not take the side of the Jewish boy and the nuns. Yet we disliked seeing the soldiers take advantage of the girls. We turned toward the bearded switchman. He was laughing. Like a host

with some restless guests, he solved the problem. He approached the soldiers, offered them cigarettes, and with a smile in his eyes, said:

"Now listen, children, don't argue outside here. Come on inside and I will fix you some tea. You can talk this all over at the table. I'm sure everything will be all right. No use trying to settle it out here on the road. Come on inside, everybody. Come on, brothers—come on, sisters." And under each arm he took the arm of one of the two girls, the silent laugh of deviltry never leaving his face. The soldiers wouldn't let go, so five abreast they went through the door. Stopping in the opening he shouted at us, "Brothers, tie the horses under the shed and come inside."

The Commissioner made a movement, but Alec stopped him and said softly, "Don't interfere, Comrade. Maybe it's all for the best. The two soldiers may fall asleep in the warm room and then the girls can go away. Or else maybe in peaceful talk it will be easier to change their minds."

That was a piece of straw for the lost Commissioner, and he agreed immediately. He helped us to tie the horses, and that done, we went after the old man and the two couples. The whole crowd followed us in, sighing and groaning.

XXIV

THE WEDDING

We entered the room. Everybody took a place on the benches around the wall, behind long and narrow tables. All the women arranged themselves on one side, and the men on the other. The two soldiers sat in the first corner to the right of the door—the seat of honor in a Russian house. This corner, where the ikons hang, has always been known as the Red Corner, red in Russia being colloquial for beautiful. The soldiers did not wait to be invited. They plumped themselves down in the Red Corner, holding fast to their girls.

The girls, still silent, seemed to be even more bewildered than before. They were beautiful young creatures, eighteen or nineteen years old, fresh, plump, astonished as babies, hardly realizing what all this was about. Since early childhood they had been confined to a nuns' school, with restrictions and routine four centuries old, in seclusion from the rest of the world. The old priest and the aging nuns were their law, the Mother Superior their authority and last resort in all doubts. Then the Revolution came and strange people changed all this order. The girls saw the little priest trembling, they saw the Mother Superior stutter and bow before men who stood with their caps on in the refectory and even in the chapel. Lessons, services, sermons—all were interrupted and broken. It was the devil's work. That was the only explanation they got from their superiors, whispered in dark corners with tight lips and flaming eyes.

Then suddenly one morning they were told to pack their few belongings, to climb into a wagon. Next to them they found two husky laughing soldiers, with all thirty-two teeth glistening, who did not respect anybody or anything, and who at once started to make love to them. At first they were afraid of these soldiers—these were the "devils" themselves, but later they discovered there was a peculiar sweetness in the pranks of these devils. At any rate, here they were right between the two, while everybody watched with horror, but no one "delivered them from the evil."

In the meantime the switchman busied himself and in five minutes everybody had tea. Then he brought on all the food he had in the house. There was a little milk, buckwheat cakes, sour cream and dried herrings, onions and dill pickles. When everybody had begun to eat, one of the soldiers looked around, whispered to his friend, and then putting the hand of his girl into the free hand of the other man, went out. In no time he returned with the unfinished bottle of liquor and placed it on the table in front of them. Again he took the girl's hand in his.

Everybody else was eating in silence, from the corners of their eyes watching the soldiers and the girls. The only one who kept on talking was the host. He laughed, joked, filled up the cups, fried the cakes and cut bread. Even from the priest's huge wife, though she was almost paralyzed with terror, he managed to squeeze a couple of faint reactions. Her round, pale, moonlike face shrank painfully each time he addressed her, and she showed her solitary yellow tooth. I'm sure she was trying to smile.

The Jewish Commissioner neither sat down nor ate. He walked nervously around the room, stopped by Alec, by the old nun, by me, to each excitedly complaining of the crudeness and lack of discipline of the Russian people.

"That's what three hundred years of tyranny have done

for those people," he said to each one. "What's the use of Revolution?"

Then he went up to the priest and said in a loud accusing voice, "See what three hundred years of *your* tyranny have done to these people."

The priest winked his old eyes guiltily, then nodded his head, and leaning toward the boy, whispered:

"Awful times. Awful times, I tell you."

His wife sniffed and began to cry.

The Commissioner turned impatiently to the old nun and said, "Can't you order your pupils to resist those brutes?"

The nun looked at him dumbly, not understanding a word of what he said, or even really hearing it. Her eyes were fixed on one of the soldiers, who was slowly and deliberately kissing his girl's ear.

The Commissioner waved his hand hopelessly and again approached the priest, but seeing his terrified face and eyes riveted on the same soldier, turned away. There was nobody he could talk to.

Finally the boy came back to Alec and me and, holding me by the button on my coat, his weasel face close to mine, said:

"Comrades, your revolutionary duty is to stand by me if those two ruffians keep on. We are three conscientious citizens and must organize and not allow them to do what they want, even if it comes to extreme measures . . . your duty is to help me."

Alec, nodding his head, answered without a smile:

"Certainly, Comrade, we will help you. Just organize us. And tell us what to do."

"Good," started the Commissioner oratorically, when one of the soldiers suddenly pounded the butt of his rifle on the floor and shouted at us, "Comrades, give that flea a sock in the neck, and stop buzzing. Let's have our meal in quiet."

The Jewish boy moved away from us as if pulled by the neck, and sat down among the eight girls on the bench opposite the two soldiers. He held his gun on his knee, and quieted down. For the time being there was silence in the room, interrupted only by the crackling of the fire, and the crunching and chewing of the people.

I watched the two soldiers. They behaved as if they were alone in the universe. They were drunk, and tender toward the girls. To be sure, the girls were willing enough to receive their tenderness. Besides, what else could they do?

One of them had a tiny golden cross hanging on a black ribbon around her neck, over the high collar of her uniform. Either the cross or the firm heaving breasts attracted the eye of the soldier. Respectfully he started to play with the cross, trying to find just the right place for it on the girl's bosom. Smiling and blushing, she was holding off his hands. She giggled when he could not find the spot on which he wanted the cross and ran his fingers all over her.

At last he whispered: "That cross of yours shouldn't be on the outside—it should be inside—close to your heart." No sooner had he said this than he started to unbutton her collar and bodice. The girl grabbed his hands and naïvely screamed, "Oh, Jesus Christ, don't do that."

The Commissioner could not stand it any longer. He popped up from his seat, dashed over to the old switchman who was pouring tea, and asked him where the nearest village was, and where was the telephone. The man told him that the nearest village was ten miles away, and that the telephone wires were all cut. "But don't you worry. Everything will be all right. Take it easy. The thing for you to do is to sit down and have half a dozen good griddle cakes and three cups of tea."

The boy looked helplessly around, sat down by us and said, "All right, give me some."

Again there was silence. The other girl belched. Everybody looked at her. She poured her tea into a saucer, and hurriedly drank it. Slowly and with satisfaction the soldiers now ate the griddle cakes with melted butter poured over them. Now and then they whispered into the girls' ears things that made them laugh aloud, and grow red. Whenever they poured liquor into the glasses they drank to the health of the girls or one or another of those present in the room. When they drank to the two nuns, the fat one and the red-faced one turned away and hissed in disgust.

The hiss startled the girls. They looked at the nuns with fear. Their wide-open eyes seemed to ask for advice or an explanation. In all their lives they had never received so much attention from men. They had been told that to be kissed by men was the greatest conceivable sin. And now when that sin had descended upon them in front of their own guardians, everybody was just as helpless as they themselves. Should they behave like Christian martyrs? Hardly, because they were not suffering much. Or wouldn't it be just as well to accept the caresses and plunge headlong into the abyss of sweet unknown sin?

The other girls tried not to look at the four at all; or pretended that they did not hear anything. They drank their tea with intense concentration, and their eyes were lowered. But each time the soldiers kissed the girls, all eyes popped and all stared as if asking, "Now, what's going to happen?"

Once again the little Jew got up. This time he tiptoed over to the corner where the fragile priest, his huge wife and the two nuns were looking into their cups. The frightened moon-faced nun got up and bowed to him. In a nasal voice, she said:

"God will reward you."

The boy waved his hand in her face and in tones of disgust said: "Oh, stop that nonsense. Listen, all of you—

this is the last time I'm telling you. I'll use my revolutionary authority to the limit." He turned his head and looked over at the soldiers, and finished in a whisper: "And I'll shoot those two bandits if you don't persuade them . . . if you don't stop them."

The fat nun, not sure whom she feared most—the two drunken warriors of Christ, or the little Jewish Commissioner all hung about with guns—looked with wide-open eyes into the boy's face, and making many swift crosses over her bosom, took a long breath and whispered sanctimoniously:

"As you order, little Father . . . as you order. Jesus Christ will reward you. The Holy Virgin will bless you. Saint Nicholas the defender will guide you. God Almighty won't desert you in His mercy."

The boy, as though he were suffering actual pain, turned on her and said: "Will you stop that nonsense. . . . Please stop it."

Alec looked at me and lifted his eyebrows. I looked back at him and pursed my lips. He rose and approached the group. Everybody looked at him with expectant eyes. He spoke to the old priest.

"I really do think, Father, that the comrade is right. Talk to them nicely. You know how to talk to people and you can ease them down. Tell them to deliver the girls and then they'll be free to do whatever they want—after they have done their duty . . . ."

The Commissioner interrupted excitedly: "That's right, that's right. After I get rid of them and they're not my responsibility any more, let them go to the devil's mother. I don't care what happens to them. Go ahead and tell them. Go ahead . . . I order you."

The priest winked his eyes and whispered, "You are the boss—yes, you are the boss now. Awful times . . . oh, what

awful times!" And the ancient little man, dragging his feet, nervously rubbing his hands, moved cautiously toward the soldiers and, bending over the table, said:

"Brothers, let God's old servant speak to you."

The soldiers jumped up and grabbed the priest by the hands.

"Speak, Father, speak—take a drink, sit down and speak. There's nothing like a nice little chat."

The priest sat down and, trying not to offend them, sipped a little bit of the liquor, and began:

"Awful times, brothers. Awful times . . ."

The soldiers nodded, and silently listened.

The priest continued. In churchly fashion and in a holy voice, softly he began with the statement that one of the deepest foundations of the Holy Orthodox church is the institution of marriage, that one who doesn't marry but assaults a woman commits a mortal sin, thus becoming a sinner and a lost soul. That God, seeing people marrying each other, rejoices in Heaven, but seeing people in sinful relations, cries bitter tears and sobs in sorrow.

In the room a dead silence had fallen. Even the bearded switchman stood with a towel in one hand and a glass in the other, as if waiting for something. The old priest sobbed and twisted his fingers, looking at the soldiers and the girls. Choked with emotion, unable to speak any more, he babbled something which nobody could understand, trying to help himself with gestures. He looked like a dumb man who wants to speak. Both couples were touched by the old man's tears. One of the girls began to cry. Her soldier bent across the bosoms of the two girls, while they held their red faces back, trying to squeeze themselves into the wall and avoid his touch. And into the astonished ear of the priest he whispered:

"God will reward you for your kindness, and for your

wisdom, Father," he said. "Marry us right now and right here."

The priest opened his mouth and sat that way. This was not what he had expected. He looked helplessly around the room, and especially at his wife. She had not heard what the soldier said, but, seeing her husband in trouble, petrified and silent, came quickly to him and asked,

"What is it, Father. . . . What did he say? What did he say?"

The soldier, swaying, got up from the bench, holding his girl by the hand. He bowed to the priest's wife, and, with bulging eyes, said solemnly:

"Mother dear, give us a blessing. We are going to be married." And he stroked the girl's head tenderly.

For a second everybody in the room stopped breathing. The old switchman chuckled. Covering his mouth with his towel, he said to me:

"Fine. The sheep will be alive and the wolves won't be hungry."

The old priest stammered, "I . . . I . . . I can't do it. It's irregular . . . I can't. . . ."

The soldier, with drunken persistence, shook his finger at the priest.

"Oh, yes, you can, Father. What was irregular before is regular now. The new order changed everything. Get busy, Father, we're in a hurry, aren't we, sweetheart?"

And he kissed his girl.

The priest tried to argue.

"I have no papers with me, brothers, no books. I haven't got any accessories. I can't marry you."

The other soldier, who until now had not understood what was coming to him, jumped from his seat, waved his hands and shouted:

"Get him all the papers he wants. Somebody get him

all the papers. Never mind books . . . here are my documents, Comrade. God Almighty won't mind about the accessories."

The priest's wife sought to help her husband. In a motherly calming tone, she said:

"Children dear, can't you postpone the wedding for a couple of hours? Can't you wait until we reach the town?"

The soldiers looked at each other, looked at the girls, sighed, then one of them shifted his pants with both hands and said in a whisper to the priest's wife:

"Allow me to assure you, Mother, it's impossible."

The other soldier gave only a quick glance at the girl's heaving bosom and repeated in a sad but steady voice:

"Absolutely impossible."

Now the Jewish boy saw a streak of light—saw the solution. Courage came back to him; he lifted his voice and in a businesslike way told the soldiers that the priest would marry them immediately they arrived in the town. It was their duty first to deliver the girls.

"Just two hours, boys. Now be sensible. . . . Only two hours," he pleaded.

With drunken shrewdness, one of the soldiers replied.

"Ah, but in time of war who knows what will happen in two hours. To-day is the day. Now is the time. Don't you think so, my darling?" he said to his girl.

Without moving, the red-faced nun, who looked like a horse and who had been silent all the time, said with fury:

"You can't do it, you can't do it. She must ask her parents."

The soldier thundered: "Who are her parents?"

The nun, innocently, not realizing what she was saying, and with an air of making a discovery, said: "Her father is the sergeant of police."

The soldier got pale, and slammed the table with his fist.

"And do you suppose that I, a hero of the World's War and the bloodless Revolution, would ask a damned police dog whom I should marry?" He picked up his rifle and turned to the priest. "Marry us right away, you old mushroom, or I'll . . ."

I interfered. "Go ahead and marry them, Father. The comrade is right—the days of police power are over."

The old switchman backed me up, as did Alec.

The Jewish boy threw his hands in the air, and not addressing any one in particular, asked: "You think you are civilized?"

And right away he answered himself, "Completely uncivilized . . . completely." And then he sat by the window, turning his back on the whole thing.

We proceeded with the marriage. The soldiers insisted that everything be done in form. The old switchman helped us build a little altar in the center of the room. We took a couple of ikons from the corner, and the priest's wife and the host took the place of parents and blessed the couples. Instead of the two crowns that are supposed to be held above the heads of the bride and groom, we used two large brass trays. The nuns and the other girls rose, trembling, and huddled in a corner. Then the ritual of the Orthodox wedding started. The red-faced nun lifted her finger and sang a pitch in falsetto and they all burst out singing, *Here Comes the Bride.*

One of the soldiers produced a ring made of the aluminum part of a shell. The other borrowed a ring from one of the singing girls. Alec and I were best men for each couple. So the ceremony proceeded. The priest, still bewildered and reluctant, and singing the words of the service with professional speed, threw helpless glances around. Nobody

could, or wanted to help him. Even his wife, with one eye on the soldiers' rifles, nudged him to go on. The priest went on.

In the middle of the ceremony one of the bridegrooms suddenly stopped the priest, lifted his hand and, turning around to all the girls, said:

"Darlings, you don't sing right. I want heavenly singing. Can't you sing with inspiration? Can't you put more feeling into the words? Begin over again."

With his back to the priest and the bride, he started them off and conducted the singing for a few bars and then turned back well pleased with himself. At this moment his bride began to cry. He embraced her kindly, and in a fatherly manner quieted her. He told her he would get her a nice gold ring in town, and would buy her a new dress, and everything else—make a real lady out of her. The girl stopped crying. All this time the priest stood waiting to pray. Through with the chorus and the girl, the soldier gave his permission.

"Proceed, Father."

The priest, figuring that the marriage was illegal anyway, and annoyed at all this interruption, started to mutter words in a still greater hurry. The soldier stopped him again.

"No, that won't do, Father. Now pray with feeling, will you, please? We'll pay you. But we want a thrilling service. Thrilling, please—with a sob in your heart!"

And the priest had to put all his professional feeling into every word of the ritual.

In twenty minutes they were married. The soldiers secured a dirty old ledger, the property of our host, and made the priest write an account of the whole affair, all the witnesses, the best man, and attached their signatures. They carefully tore out the pages, folded them, and put them into their inside pockets, and then went around the room,

bowing and thanking everybody. When they reached the priest they each gave him twenty rubles. He didn't want to take them, but his wife did. We were the last ones they came to. One of them, proud and pleased, said to me:

"Comrade, may I have the honor to introduce to you Mrs. Voron, my spouse. And this is Mrs.—— What in hell is your name?" he asked the other soldier.

"Sapagov," answered the other soldier, shaking my hand.

"Sapagov . . . Mrs. Sapagov . . . Comrade Sapagov's spouse."

Then he turned around and in a voice which made even the glass in the window shake, he yelled:

"Now everybody get out of here . . . to the devil's mother. We want to be left alone. Everything's all right now."

Everybody got out. The couples were left alone in the big room. The nuns and the girls were climbing on to the wagons, and the old priest was arguing with his wife.

"Sacrilege, I tell you, sacrilege. You shouldn't have taken that money."

The Commissioner said to me:

"Comrade, the Russian people are still unconscious, absolutely unconscious. . . . Three hundred years of tyranny have done that."

We talked with him for a while, got all the information we wanted about the nearest town and general conditions, shook hands and parted. The old switchman stood at his door, smiled, and then went to his beehives.

We started on the way west, but after half a mile we turned around into the woods and walked back to the camp.

XXV

WOLF'S LAW

EVERY day brought new troubles. We were much farther south than we wanted to be. The country was covered with hills, forests and ravines. One would think—ideal country to hide in and move unnoticed. But more people lived here. We often stayed in hide-outs for days without fire for fear of being discovered. Along the river banks that gave us shelter we had to look out for small hamlets, estates and separate buildings. They were often in ruins—still some sort of people clung to them. Naturally, we avoided the big cities, but when we approached one we had to send out scouts because in the big cities more and better information was to be had. The information came from every possible source: stray soldiers, tea houses, public places, loose crowds and meetings. Sometimes we went even to headquarters, where we would ask the whereabouts of some regiment, pretending to belong to it. In that way we would start a conversation and might possibly get what we wanted.

The cities were restless. They were full of odd lots of soldiers, probably those whose homes were too far away. These hung on to each other in small and large herds. At first they did this only to get food, but gradually they got in the way of taking a fur coat if they found it and then liquor or money or silver or jewelry. When the city became too crowded for them, they moved out of it into the hills and forests, where they hid between raids. These bands were particularly dangerous for us, because they, too,

were hiding. They were just as clever and silent as we—and just as much on the look-out.

Each band had its leader, a matured, embittered soldier or sergeant, skilled in silent attack and unmerciful fight. War had nursed him for years and taught him one thing: the small value of other people's lives and property. The end of the war turned him from a hero into a vulture.

The men under him had to be worthy of their leader. Peasants turned into wild beasts, silent, hardly exchanging words. Just as they used to do in No Man's Land, they crawled on their bellies, surrounding a home, or a hamlet, or a railroad station. They would rise swiftly, running and striking, firing their rifles and guns easily and with precision acquired by many months of war practise. At the least resistance, they would throw a hand grenade. They got what they wanted or could use. And then silently and rapidly, they dispersed into the woods or hills. Pursuit, attempts at vengeance were impossible. Each man went in a different direction, without leaving a track behind. The lightly wounded they carried away. The mortally hurt were finished by a merciful comrade right on the spot. They were like wolves who tear to pieces the weaklings or wounded young.

A year ago they had been getting St. George's crosses and hand-shakes from commanding generals. Now they got food, clothing, liquor, silver, gold and women. The work was the same, the profits much greater. Aim? But who can explain in simple human language the aim of any war? I can understand a man who in delirium runs out of his cell and shoots the passer-by across the street. On the same basis, I can understand the nation that goes into war "for the honor and security of the nation."

The honor and security of a country are never so handicapped as when its army goes home, victorious or otherwise,

and discovers that murder, rape, theft, assault, inflicting wounds and poisoning are punishable crimes. Yesterday they had been rewarded virtues.

It's too much for the human brain. It revolts. It revolts more when a back-seat driver of a war, with bulging eyes and manicured hands, slams down the Bible and yells: "Don't you understand, in God's name, that those are enemies? Enemies of your country? Enemies of civilization? Enemies of progress? Enemies of prosperity?" And he used to add: "Enemies of the one God in Heaven," but for some reason or other doesn't say that any more. The human brain revolts because when it sees those "enemies" at the distance of lance or bayonet, it can discover no enmity in them nor in itself, except delirium and madness. And it takes years to adjust oneself to a reversed order of things.

Every war is like that. It begins with the highest ideals and it finishes with wolfish instincts aroused and glorified. Victory or defeat doesn't make any difference. Political perturbation has nothing to do with it.

Now and then in our wanderings at night we stumbled over a little camp and, crawling behind the trees, approached and listened. Wolves spied on wolves. Sometimes it was a division of loot with bloody fights or a drunken orgy; sometimes the tormenting of rich landlords or their wives and daughters, who had been taken prisoners. Revenge—or blood—delirium. The peasantry, infected by the general bloodshed, was rising and had started pogroms against the estates and mansions of the rich. Afterward they ran away and hid in the forest, or joined already existing packs.

One night when we were sure that we were moving unnoticed along a river bank among the tall willow bushes, we were attacked pointblank by such a pack. They gave

no warning, they asked no questions, they gave no reason. A sudden attack, a short fight, and they were gone, leaving behind one dead man and carrying off a couple of wounded. We lost four men and counted a dozen wounded.

That night attack stays in my memory as the most silent, dark and insane danger in the whole chain of such days and nights. Looking back to it, I see long rows of young weeping willow trees, covered with yesterday's night rain, swaying their long branches in a brisk night wind—occasionally striking us across the face with cold wet lashes. The mysterious silent sighing of a slowly flowing river right next to the road, interrupted now and then by a splash of a fish or a frog, so near by that it sounds almost as if it were under the horses' hoofs. The moonless sky, with patches of stars set in gun-blue clouds, far away and so strange, so inhospitable, that one does not care to look into it and pray or sigh. The earth seems much warmer and more human. The turf is soft and damp—easy on the horses' feet. It is covered with tall dry grass, growing in close clumps and so high that one could reach it bending down from the horse. Every time the horse's legs cut through, it makes a sound of a deep tender quality, as if saying: "Hush—hush—hush—be quiet."

We are quiet. We do not know what may be ahead of us. Scouts are riding half a mile before us and that makes us feel secure, though careful.

I am riding at the end of the column with the last platoon. Suddenly in front of me I hear four shots in quick succession. A desperate scream not very far away: "Jesus Mary!"—and a strange gurgling sound, as if some one is imitating a frog.

Another few shots behind me. All the horses suddenly start into a gallop. The willow trees are fast disappearing. An open field, scarcely visible, unrolls before us. It is as

if darkness throws it at us for mercy's sake. More shots still. But not a word—not another groan. Strange shadows appear ahead of us from somewhere. Jumping, dismounting, rushing sidewise. Beats of spurs on horses' bellies—forcing them to separate, to spread, to go away, one from another. The clang of sabers.

A salvo of shots from another side of the meadow. And suddenly a sickening thud of sabers and horses' hoofs hitting living flesh.

Without a command, the lancers spread over the meadow and form a crescent. It is called "Lava" and is of Tartar origin—the ancient and best formation for attacking cavalry. And now we are closing its horns, trying to cut off the attackers.

"Damn your mother!"

A yell in Russian suddenly pierces the darkness almost next me. Searching the darkness with my eyes, peering so tensely that I feel physical pain, I can barely distinguish a man trying to mount a horse ahead of me. I rush at him and my Bell knocks him over when he is almost in the saddle.

I pull the reins and see the man as he falls on the other side of his horse. I can't reach him. He gets up and starts to run. I go after him, pulling the left rein to reach him on his left side. I hear his heavy breathing—and let my saber go. It falls down with a swish and it is stopped by something hard. Skull or shoulder bone. I hit again. The man falls.

Bell suddenly plunges into the bushes. Twigs are scratching my face. We cross the meadow.

We are again among the weeping willows. I stand and listen. The thud of hoofs is all I hear. Some of them close by, some of them in the distance. I move slowly toward the river. In guerrilla warfare the most prominent object

is always the place of assembly. I find a group of lancers already there. Chmiel is lying on the ground. His orderly is cutting his boot off with a knife. He has fallen from his horse and sprained or broken his leg.

Another lancer starts to howl like a dog. Far-distant barking answers him. It is our signal of communication. In the darkness and stillness, the howling sounds more like wolves than dogs. We are all standing by the water, almost speechless, leaning on the horses. We almost sniff every rider who appears from the darkness and takes his place in our pack.

In one hour every one has come back. We count our numbers. Two scouts are missing. They were killed first, before they had a chance to warn us. One lancer is shot twice through the lung. He is brought by another, lying across the saddle, vomiting blood with every breath. We lift him down and lay him on the ground. He dies. We tie a few stones to his neck and legs and throw him into the river.

Major Krasof, another Russian officer who was with us, is still missing. We can not look for him. We leave him dead or wounded—we don't know. The last party of six lancers has brought a wounded prisoner with them. He is gagged and his hands are tied. The Sergeant ungags him and tries to learn about his troop or band, or the reason for the attack. The moment the gag is off, he starts to twist, fight and throw himself around, yelling piercingly for help. A blow on his head silences him almost in the middle of his first outcry. Everybody stiffens and takes his carbine off the shoulder straps. Then we listen tensely for a while. No answer comes. Everything is quiet. The attackers are far away or hidden without betraying themselves.

The prisoner lies stunned on the ground. We can hardly see his face.

"Give me a rope," says the Sergeant in a whisper. . . .

We left him hanging among the threadlike weeping willow branches, just as straight and wistful as they. We never learned who attacked us and what for.

The existence and actions of these bands were dire in the general uncertainty. War—abdication—freedom—hunger. Whites, Reds, Greens madly lashing everybody with their propaganda. The people did not know what to do. Every man was afraid of every other. No one trusted any one, not even himself. Freedom sounded safe and alluring, so they turned on all who they thought were checking that freedom. They tasted a little blood. With astonishment they found that the provisional government did not at all approve of their judgment, their bloody proceedings or their personal vengeance. It was a blow to discover that the so-called oppressors were considered the same kind of citizens as themselves, and were supposed to have the same rights. That was not freedom to the mob's liking. And there was nobody who could stop them, so they proceeded, objecting to any authority except their own. And the more freely, because at that time there were some who, in a silent whisper, stimulated their revolt: the Communists.

Communistic propaganda at that time was concentrated on one idea: "Ruin everything. Exterminate everything. After that we will build anew."

XXVI

RAVINE

One night ten of us were scouting along the road, when we saw rising over the edge of a ravine the red glow of fire. We smelled smoke.

Leaving the horses behind with two men, we crept up cautiously through the thick underbrush. On all fours we crawled to the edge and looked over the precipice. Far below, a crowd of people was gathered around bonfires.

Our road should have taken us straight across the ravine, but we could not pass unseen. We must find another way. We were turning away when my orderly, Watzek, who never left me in all the months of wandering, pulled my sleeve.

"Sir Lieutenant . . . look . . . women!" he whispered.

I stopped, then crawled back again, sticking my head under the protection of a clump of weeds far over the edge, so that I could see better. The eight lancers who were with me did the same. We held our breath.

In the bottom of a black bowl, red hell coiled and swarmed. As through reverse opera-glasses it appeared, unreal, like some stupendous show on a stage. It was too far below for words or sentences to come clear, but now and then a scream or an oath would be sifted through the sheet of smoke rising slowly toward us. Distant and vague, they did not sound human.

We had come on one of the bands. All the men seemed to have on army uniforms. Knapsacks and coats were scattered all around. There were three or four small tents.

People were standing, sitting and lying around the fires. Some were busy preparing food. And each man had a woman or two with him. In spite of the disorder, the men had a certain look of uniformity, but the women seemed unrelated to each other.

My eyes were fixed on the brightest spot below, the big camp-fire where stood a kettle of boiling meal. The fire threw its light on the faces and figures near by. Their small short movements from our distance looked so much like the bursting bubbles of a boiling stew that in my vision the ravine itself became one huge kettle, filled with human stew and lashed with a devilish inner fire.

The women held us. Neither the boys nor I could take our eyes from that charmed red circle filled with women who were held there by the men. That much we could make out. We hung on the edge of the cliff and watched with envy and hunger every couple below, every woman who sat or lay apart.

I don't know how, and why, or from where all these people had come to this place. Perhaps some members of the band had kidnaped a few women because they wanted them. The other men, stirred by example and lust, went out and picked up more women, some being lured by the promise of stolen jewelry, some light women not caring where the soldier took them; some, stolen away in a raid like a herd of cattle, were gagged, bound and thrown on to the ground. Now in the stillness of the night and the warmth of the fires, the men were satisfying themselves.

We saw skirts torn and white legs kicking desperately. We heard the thin echo of the laughter of the men who were watching the struggle.

We saw two women with torn bodices, their heavy breasts swaying and jerking, fighting each other for a canteen of

liquor. They fell on to the ground and rolled around. Then we heard the men laughing far off and faint.

We saw a woman flattened to the ground by a man. Like a hawk with a dove, he dug his sharp nails into her flesh, moving his head as the hawk his beak, when he hammers the brain and life out of his prey. The woman threw her hands about in quick convulsive gestures, and the warm air brought upward to us her monotonous and continuous high-pitched screams.

We saw a young girl, her hair flying in the air, running wildly around among the men, trying to avoid them, as if playing hide-and-seek. But each time a man let the girl go he tore away part of her dress. At last, naked, she ran around, jumping and stumbling, trying to reach and hide in the bushes. But the men would overtake her and push her back toward the light. There they held her or dragged her or mauled her—two or three at a time. She fell down once—quickly got up and, naked, jumped into the fire, the men dragging her out of it and swarming over her.

A lancer cursed and moved restlessly.

"Stay quiet, you dog's blood," said another. "You'll slide down . . ."

Again we lay still.

Below, a man rolled on the ground with two women, who threw their arms around his neck and convulsively kicked their intermingled legs in the air.

Close to the fire, a fat short girl danced with nothing on but a white shirt, throwing it joyously over her head every now and then. The men around her were lying and standing in a close circle, a big canteen of liquor passing from mouth to mouth.

In the farthest corner stood two girls, back to back, one armed with a stick, the other with a saber. They fought off a pack of men who were trying to get them with their bare

hands, and throwing chunks of earth. Finally the girls ran toward the steep slope of the ravine and started to climb straight toward us. They climbed so desperately, and yelled, "My God! My God! Let us go," so pitiably that the lancers aimed their carbines, ready to shoot. Thinking about the rest of the regiment, I stopped them.

It would have been quite useless, and when we saw that the men had overcome the girls and dragged them back again, we continued to lie quiet and watch. We did not know whether they had any outposts or scouts around, or how many of them there actually were. And deep within me another thought lurked. These people below, in their longing for comfort, rest, food, riches, marauded about the country and were at war with every single body who had anything they wanted. This time they wanted women. And like sly foxes, they went one by one, grabbed or procured or bought all sorts of women and led them down to their lair. Now they were feeding their hunger.

In the dark chilly night, with the leaves almost all fallen, with the black sky and bright white stars, the wholesale rape was infectious. From that round red-and-yellow spot, about five hundred feet below us, rose screams of satisfaction, yells of horror, groans and crazy outbursts of laughter. Its unreality made us feel queer, and shiver all over. We could not tear ourselves away. We hung on the edge and looked down as if we were watching Hell open, and as if that Hell enchanted and lured us. Some of the lancers crawled away. I heard their teeth chatter, and I dimly saw their glistening eyes. Hungry eyes. In a few minutes they crawled back and watched again. Hardly any of us spoke. After all each one of us knew what we were thinking. We were hungry, too, for white soft flesh. And if to one of us had come the notion to attack these men below, I am not sure that the same performance wouldn't have continued,

and that we would not have taken the places of the men in the ravine.

At two o'clock in the morning, disgust and fatigue won. We decided that we had better try to find another way to cross the river, even though we did have to move about nine miles back. We went in silence, reached our horses and swiftly moved away. Every time I closed my eyes I could see a woman's white body, shaking and dancing close—soft thighs, breasts, shoulders. It was hard to keep my eyes open, and it was hard to keep them shut.

Between four and five in the morning we reached the rest of the regiment. We reported the situation and started away to the west. Soon we came upon a ford, crossed the river and plunged into another forest.

XXVII

AND THEN WHAT?

A FEW days later we came to a lovely old estate, a big mansion in early Russian Empire style, dressed with tall columns and green roof and set in an English park, beautiful even in ruin. It was the summer home of a rich landlord. From the top of a hill it looked down with the black eyes of its broken windows on a huddle of houses, which was the nearest village. It lay three miles away, on the low sandy bank of the river.

Carefully we went through the house. Everything in it was smashed and broken. Not a window was left. The exquisite furniture was chopped to pieces, the fabric cut, the pictures either slashed with bayonets, or scrawled in mud with obscene writing.

Everywhere around the rooms small things—the little belongings which make human quarters individual and livable—were scattered over the floors in a mania of destruction. Hardwood inlaid floors were hacked and sliced. Many doors had been opened by axes or by the discharge of a full magazine of bullets into the lock. On the floor heaps of letters, bills, diaries, books, packs of photographs and snap-shots. We would pick up a letter out of curiosity. It would begin "Dear Mother" or "Dear Aunt"—commonplace family letters. In some corners were ikons, shot to pieces as if some one had used them for practise shooting, their silver or gold framings torn away. In one or two rooms there were splotches of blood.

And not a soul inside or outside. It was as lonely and

abandoned as a tree, solitary in a field, struck by lightning and twisted. We made up our minds to spend a day here. It looked safe, as all approaches to the house for a mile around were in full view. We placed the horses in the back yard, where there was ample room, and found plenty of hay for them. And then some of us immediately lay down and slept. Others wandered from one room to another trying to guess what had happened in this house. Still others were tidying and cleaning themselves. It was a long time since we had been under a roof.

I went out through a small covered passage into a separate annex and found myself in a roomy private chapel. It was quiet here. A few pigeons flew away from the high sills of the broken windows. It was two stories high and had once been beautifully decorated with brown and bluish Byzantine mosaics, and gilded gates in front of the carved wood altar, and precious oil lamps, ikons and pictures. Now on the mosaic floor everything lay shattered to pieces. I looked around. At my left was the family vault, in a niche leading ten steps down and divided from the chapel by a rich bronze partition. With some force this had been torn to pieces, and the gates were broken and lying on the floor. I went down the steps into the vault. Six coffins of different sizes and forms had been thrown out and wrenched open, some with axes, some perhaps with small doses of dynamite.

I looked into a skull with long black hair. I looked into a decayed rich uniform queerly flat, just sticking up a little bit where the ribs would be. I looked into a little child's coffin which had been pried open, but it was strangely empty. A hand with dark parchment-like skin, as if glued to the bones, lay chopped off and the ax was still lying by it. Some one had probably taken off the bracelets.

The sun was throwing rays of light into the niche and on

to the floor. From above, a stained-glass skylight, smashed in places, threw bright colors like butterflies. Although all the windows in the chapel were open, the place smelled moldy and damp. I remember standing there and thinking: "After all, nothing can hurt them; nothing . . . they don't exist any more—they don't even know about it."

I went out and in the yard saw Doctor Kraj coming down the stairs of the back entrance. He looked upset, as he beckoned to me and said:

"Say, I think I have found something that I don't know what to do with. Come on with me."

He led me through many rooms and corridors to a winding wooden stairway, and pointed to the steps. I saw tracks and drops of blood. "What is it?" I asked.

"You will see," he grunted.

We moved up and up. He stopped before a wooden door which was half open. He entered first. I followed him. Here was an attic built of substantial brown beams, centuries old. Dust lay around in thick undisturbed layers—but there was little disorder. You could hear the cooing of pigeons in a corner, and light was coming through one small opening in the wall. I couldn't see very well because it was fairly dark. The doctor seemed to know where he was going. He was picking his way among the pieces of furniture, old-fashioned trunks and boxes, flower-pots and that sort of thing until he came to the far corner where there was another window which I hadn't noticed because it was covered by several loose doors piled one on top of another. The doctor turned to me and pointed down. I looked.

On the floor, half leaning against the wall, lay a woman about thirty-two years old, with one arm through the sleeve of an English overcoat. Under it was a sort of silk negligée of black, through which yellowish linen could be seen. She was lying motionless but with her eyes wide open, and she

was breathing like a fish with a slow movement, opening her mouth and moving her chin with each breath. Two or three feet to her left were sitting two children, one probably two years old and the other six. The two-year-old child was either dead or sleeping, the six-year-old was whining so low we could barely hear it. I looked at the doctor expecting him to do something.

Silently he took the woman's overcoat and negligée and swung it open. Her abdomen was blue and black, torn by wounds. Her thighs were covered with blood.

The Doctor said, "Look," and he exposed her left shoulder. Above her left breast were three bullet holes.

I kneeled and asked her what had happened. But she could not answer at all. Only her eyes barely moved toward her left where the children were. I tried a couple of times to urge her to tell me what had happened. Not getting any answer I said, "Doctor, do something."

"I will," he answered quickly. I saw him turning away and getting his hypodermic needle, and then I moved to the children and looked them over.

They were in half-fainting condition, but as far as I could see they had not been hurt. While I was busy with the children, I saw the eyes of the woman, steady as fish eyes, watching me without expression. A mechanical gaze. Then the Doctor bent over her and pushed home the needle of the hypodermic.

"Let's go," he half whispered, and picked up the smaller child. I took the older one and said, "How about her?"

"She will be all right. I gave her a horse's dose."

"What?" I asked him.

"Strychnine. See, she is dead already. Let's go."

Holding the girl in my arms, I walked down-stairs, trying not to step into the blood which I now knew had be-

longed to the woman. We took the children to the Doctor's pack. He and the lancers did what they could. Fed with hot tea and soup, washed in warm water and wrapped up in horse blankets, the children slept. The lancers walked around them on tiptoes and whispered.

Doctor Kraj and myself sat by the children, silent and pensive, till it grew dark.

Suddenly, for no reason at all, the Doctor asked me:

"Say, Fatty—do you remember the night the Emperor abdicated—do you remember that God-damned lecture Bass gave us?"

I nodded.

"Wasn't that beautiful?" he said.

I looked at him. The Doctor was a Royalist and White to the core.

"What did you say, Doc?"

He slowly lifted his eyes, and took them away from the burning face of the younger child, half sobbing through its sleep, and steadied them into mine. They were small, widespread, greenish-gray, piercing eyes. His lips were tightly shut as if he were afraid to open them. Finally he leaned forward and slowly threw his words at me. They sounded more like hissing:

"I said wasn't it wonderful all that Bass said on that night—happiness of one hundred and sixty millions of people—justice between the classes—protection of the underdogs—paradise of honest workers—freedom of conscience—security for old age—reward of genius and hard toil—open road to every one with initiative—labor, equality and freedom—all that he spoke about—wasn't that beautiful, I said?"

I looked at him, not knowing what to answer. He suddenly got up, took me by the lapels of my coat and jerked his face close to mine. His lips were white. His voice

even more hissing. There was inhuman hate in his eyes now:

"It was beautiful—beautiful—I tell you, you bloody warrior—you thinking worm—it was beautiful."

I cut him short: "Oh, stop it, Doc—you're sick."

"Wait!" He shook me. "I want an answer from you." His face contorted into a painful grimace.

"Beautiful, yes." He paused, and then spat out every word: "But is all of it worth this?" He pointed to the child. "I'm asking you—is it? This child's suffering when it wakes up and says, 'Mammy . . . Mammy' . . . and waits for an answer? . . . Is it worth it?"

He held his face still close to mine and chewed his lips, not able to speak any more. Then he wiped his nose with his hand, turned around, and walked out of the room into the darkness and light drizzling rain.

One of the old lancers kept the children with him through all the dangers and hardships and placed them in an orphanage at Warsaw. They were entered under the names of Stanislas and Wanda Dowbor in memory of our Colonel who had been the last descendant of the Dowbor family of Poland.

XXVIII

LAST ROLL-CALL

ON THAT particular day, heavy black clouds lay around the horizon in clumps and swells. With slow but steady movement, they rose toward the zenith. Though it was already ten o'clock, the sun was just breaking through, and it soared across the sky, trying to escape the choking and encircling attack of the dark gigantic coils.

It is seldom that clouds gather from all four sides of the sky-line; usually they climb from one point, but on this day they were all around us. The small hill on which the house stood, the park behind it and the forest behind the park, the horseshoe bend of river in front of the house, the village far below—all these, while lighted by the bright, warm, autumn sun, were already surrounded by gloomy messengers of the stormy cold winter to come. Lovely and melancholy, the country was like a young nun's face, pale, tender, radiant in candle-light, still alive with the throb of desires and emotions, but framed with a black merciless veil, symbol of the end—oblivion—death.

Already we had spent four or five days in the ruins of the house on the hill, and the time had come for us to move. We had never remained so long in one place. But first we must make sure of the safest direction in which to move—and if we should move at all. We had an uneasy intuition that something was going on in the country on a big scale, something we were ignorant of, something we could neither control nor take part in—and besides, we were tired of our solitude, separation and endless suspense.

The night before, lancers had been sent to scout. Everybody had slept watchfully, with one eye open. Everybody waited.

Early in the morning two of the lancers came back in a sudden hurry and reported. At a Council of Soldiers and Peasants of the village, they had heard talk of a White Band that was hiding in Three Oaks. That meant us.

This was serious. But the lancers were not sure whether the Council knew that the White Band was a regiment of Polish Lancers. If this was known, it would mean immediate pursuit or attack because the Reds knew the Polish. Automatically, every one got ready to move at a minute's notice.

More lancers came back. One had spent the night with the Secretary of the Council of Soldiers and Peasants at the village. They had known each other two years before in a hospital at Smolensk. They had lain in neighboring beds for a month.

The Secretary was very glad to see his old friend, especially when the lancer said that he had long been "finished" with war, and was now going to offer his services to the Reds. The Secretary believed this; he had never known that the lancer was a Pole and had served in a Polish regiment.

The two men had embraced each other and spent the day and night together. The Secretary, with the help of brandy and friendly talk, had given away the secret. Orders had come from the Central Council to surround quietly the First Regiment of Polish Lancers and "enter into contact with them." The word "contact" had a broad meaning in the revolutionary dictionary. The lancer tried to find out what kind of contact was to be made with us—whether it would be peaceful approach, propaganda and endless meetings, whether a military attack and bloody liquidation of the White Hands, or whether it was to be a trial and "to the

wall." The Secretary did not yet know, but he had made it plain that for himself, he would like to exterminate the bunch of White Hands on the spot. A dozen gas shells would take care of them splendidly. On his own initiative, he had already requisitioned these from the Central Council.

"The damn Poles are no good anyway," he had said. "All they have is one lousy shirt and a pair of pants. But they think of themselves as 'nobles.' They refused to listen to us when we asked them to join us—they started to fight. They shot peasants and Red soldiers. Devil shake their mothers' graves!" he finished. "All right, we've got them now. To the wall, every scurvy son of a bitch of them!"

The lancer had agreed with him, had drunk some more brandy, and had found out that the Reds had two pieces of field artillery, a machine-gun unit, two platoons of Red cavalry, and three hundred infantry—a whole army to our handful of men. There were no shells for the field guns yet.

These were expected to-morrow. And then——

"Caput to the bourgeoisie!"

The lancer had put the Secretary to bed, left him snoring and come back to the regiment.

At first we thought we might fight it out. There were three possible approaches to the house—one from the village and the river bank; another from the forest behind the house, separated from the park of the estate only by a narrow country road and a low brick wall. The big state highway cut through the forest about three miles away. The third approach lay through fields divided into patches of cultivated ground by rows of bushes, ditches and sometimes wild apple and pear trees planted in single file. At the end of the fields was a small railroad station.

There was still time to sneak out through the chain of outposts, if there were any, to cut through the dense forest, perhaps to make a sudden attack on the infantry camp. It

was no different from the sort of thing we had been doing for weeks. We could move away for about ten miles—perhaps twenty. But then what? The Reds were on our track. Sooner or later we would have to face a mass of them too strong for us. We were outlaws in their eyes anyhow. We could not explain to them that we had no desire to be against them. That we were not for them was enough. And we were tired—our souls were tired; our bodies were tired.

The circle had closed.

We could not afford to take chances; we could not afford to be surrounded and taken by surprise. Our outposts, placed toward the railroad station, in the forest and halfway to the village, doubled their attention and vigilance.

In a few hours they sent news back—the road was guarded by cavalry patrols—our boys had seen two of them; the railroad station had a detachment of infantry and machine-guns; and in the village, troops were preparing for action against us.

When I heard those reports, I felt as if my heart were placed in an immovable vise, with a screw turning relentlessly, slowly squeezing the life out of it. Desperate helplessness seized upon my wearied nerves—exhaustion of spirit and flesh.

With no artillery, with only one machine-gun, with open approaches on all sides, with the Reds awaiting the final order of the Council or the arrival of shells, there was no way to break through the besieging lines.

Major Var quickly called all the officers and sergeants. He did not have to explain—everybody knew. He asked for opinions, beginning, as was the custom, with the youngest in the sergeants' ranks. Each man spoke his mind in quick sentences, sometimes in two or three words.

"Fight through!"

"Pretend to turn Red."

"Negotiate."

"Sneak out at night."

"Attack the village."

All these suggestions were rejected. It seemed as though everybody had suddenly become stupid and dull. Then one of the sergeants came forward with an idea which seemed right. Immediately we decided on it unanimously. The decision was to leave the horses and saddles behind, to disguise ourselves, to destroy all evidence of belonging to the regiment and to disperse in all directions. Moving out singly or by twos, sneaking through the lines of Reds, mingling with the population, even temporarily enlisting with the Communists, we might save ourselves as remnants. We might save those remnants for Poland. With the complete collapse at the front, a man all alone had some chance of reaching Poland. Those who could not reach Poland were told to move toward Moscow or Kijow and Odessa and from there to try to find their way. Officers were ordered to go to those towns and serve as points of information and direction. I was ordered to go to Moscow.

The next place of assembly for the regiment was Warsaw—time, not stated.

We knew that some of us would be caught. But in a land where "every man for himself" was the law, it seemed a simple thing to apply that law to ourselves and to try to escape massacre by cunning and disguise.

The lancers received the decision silently. The ceremony of dissolving the unit, which had fought together for the last three years, took place at once.

All squadrons lined up, the officers took their places, the standard with its guards in front of the platoons, the Commander with his Adjutant facing the men.

The back yard of the house, surrounded as it was by a

wall, made us feel as if we were in a room. It was a quiet midday—the sun still bright and warm, a small rectangle of blue sky directly above our heads. Black crows were flying above the park and the forest in large flocks. Now and then their screeching caws rose to a mighty chorus which sounded, sometimes like laughter, sometimes like sobbing. The horses in stable and garage snorted now and then, turning their heads toward the men and looking at them, the whites of their eyes showing, as if saying:

"Don't forget us—we are with you."

Everybody was pale beneath sun- and wind-burn. Many eyes looked up at the small patch of blue sky above us.

The command rasped out in a hushed voice: "Attention!"

Everybody looked at Major Var. He began:

"Poles . . ." There was a long pause. "Lancers . . ."

I could see him fighting to keep his heart from breaking before the men, and I felt a lump in my throat. Thoughts suddenly whirled in vortex in my brain—one of them emerged into clarity. I thought, "Poles . . . Lancers . . .!" How many times, in all corners of the world, since time immemorial, those words had been addressed to bodies of men who personified the ideal of Poland's fight for independence. Lancers had always been Poland's beloved children. Heroes of its fairy-tales, they had fought for Polish standards at Tannenberg against the Crusaders—at Chocim against Cossacks and Tartars, at Vienna against the Turks, at Saragossa against Spaniards, at Leipzig against the whole world, at Borodino against Russians, one of them, Pulaski, at Savannah and the Brandywine, against the British——

And now at my side stood the boys who at Kreshowitze had "charged the enemy's wire entanglements seven times." The Polish Lancers of bygone days, their stories engraved on my mind by my mother during long evenings, by dim candle-light before I could read, had been heroes of my

boyish dreams. And the Polish Lancers standing beside me, a part of my heart, so dear to me, so unbelievably close, so alive, they seemed to be part of my own brain, body and soul.

I caught myself with my eyes full of tears. I had missed Major Var's speech—it must have been short and quiet.

He got hold of himself and rapped out sharply, slightly turning his head in the direction of the Adjutant:

"Roll-call!"

"The last roll-call"—flashed through my mind and probably everybody's else.

The silence became more profound.

The rays of the sun were still on us, but the patch of blue sky was getting smaller and smaller.

The Adjutant, who carried the whole regimental office in his brown leather military brief-case, took out a few sheets of paper, and I could hear distinctly the crackling noise they made as he spread them out before him. These dirty sheets of cheap military-form paper contained all three hundred names of the original roll-call of the regiment immediately after it was formed.

Another command: "Sabers out!"

The lines of boys now stood rigidly as if they had turned into the steel of their swords.

The Adjutant started to call off the names of the privates. The answers came in quiet voices—the lancers answered as if clearing their throats, in broken short exclamations: "Present. . . . Present. . . . Present." Now and then the Top Sergeant who stood behind the platoons answered in a firm loud voice, with a sort of shrill official desperation. It sounded like an insubordinately loud trumpet in a funeral march played by a brass band. He answered for those who were not in the ranks. His answers varied.

"On duty. . . ."

"Missing. . . ."

"Fell on the field of glory. . . ."

"Fell on the field of glory." . . . more often than any other answer. As each dead comrade was named, Major Var moved his saber to his lips, down to the earth and back to his shoulder. The platoons followed him with a quick salute of their sabers.

The roll-call of privates finished, the Adjutant called the names of the officers. I, as Commander of the First Platoon, answered for those officers who were not with us. It seemed to me that every time I had to say, "Fell on the field of glory," I lived through each death again.

I don't know whether it was by mistake or purposely that the Adjutant called the name of Major Bass who had left the regiment and gone over to the Reds, and was no longer mentioned among us. There was a dead silence. I did not know what to answer, because the man was not dead, and although he was missing, we knew where he was, and there was no military answer which defined a traitor. Still more intense silence reigned for a few seconds—the saber seemed to tremble in my hand. I turned my head slightly and saw a row of white knuckles on the saber guards of the boys of my platoon. It had formerly been Major Bass' platoon, and we all had loved him.

The pause was broken by Major Var, who shouted, "Next!"

The clear quick voice of the Adjutant continued to call out the names.

The last name called—the last answer, from Chmiel, in a high-pitched, challenging voice:

"Present."

Defying everything, in spite of everything, this boy was "Present," and he was telling the whole world about it.

"Sabers in . . . caps off . . .!"

Major Var turned on his heel toward the gate through

which we could see fields and the black horizon, crossed himself, and knelt on the ground. The platoons knelt after him. The Major started to pray.

"Ave Maria . . ."

The lancers chorused in a half whisper: *"Ave Maria . . ."*

"Gracia plena . . ."

And like an echo: *"Gracia plena . . ."*

And so on, until the short prayer to the Virgin Mary, the traditional prayer of the Polish Lancer, was repeated to the last "Amen."

Then slowly, his cap in hand, Major Var stood up and approached the standard, whose bearer lowered it before him. Major Var gave his cap to the Adjutant, untied and pulled off the dirty burlap bag which was wound around the standard. His hands were shaking; so were the sabers of the boys on guard, and the standard itself. With a pen-knife which he took from his pocket, he made a few quick slashes and cut the colors from the staff. He held the amaranthine piece of silk with its white eagle in the center, and looked at it. Every lancer's eye was riveted on the brightness of the silk. The Major held it as if it were his own bleeding heart.

He started to say something. "Remember, boys . . ." He did not finish, but folded the silk, put it inside his tunic, then uttered his last command:

"Dismissed!"

His cap on, he walked off quickly.

The platoons stood for a while as if hating to break. The standard-bearer looked at the empty stick in his hands, turning it slowly and aimlessly. The sun was gone, and black clouds rolled over the sky. Wind shook the naked trees. That seemed to awaken the bearer. He threw the stick away from him. It fell and rolled into the mud. The ranks broke suddenly.

Feverish activity followed. The boys who still wore their regimental tunics threw them away and got shirts from the other boys. They also used some of the clothing we had found in the closets of the house, chopped the buttons and chevrons from their overcoats and jackets, and threw out of their knapsacks everything which could compromise them. Some of them threw away their rifles, leaving only revolvers. Others decided to take their rifles with them.

Many were ready in no time, and after a hasty word of farewell and shaking hands, left in twos, threes or singly, disappearing into the forests. A few ventured down into the village by a round-about way.

Strange to say, the farewells to one another were not half so hard as the farewells to their horses. There were some who took their horses along, hoping they would be able to break through the forest unnoticed, though Major Var warned them that a man on a horse would be regarded as ten times as suspicious as a man on foot. A few shot their horses. You could hear men murmuring to the animals as they left them. Some cried.

In the dark evening, only a few officers were left. Alec Gutcheil and I decided to go together. We had little to change in our outfits, having been sent many times on scout duty. We could have gone much earlier, but it was hard to part with the boys. We decided to keep our horses.

Around eight o'clock, when it was quite dark, we went to Major Var and the few remaining officers, and silently shook their hands. We crossed the park, led the horses through the opening in the low brick wall, and plunged into the black forest.

XXIX

BELL

"Be careful, Alec—she's going to neigh."

"I'm watching her," Alec answered, holding his cap closer over his horse's mouth.

I put a pinch of oats from my pocket into the cap which I was likewise holding over Bell's mouth. With her thick pink lips she began fishing for every seed. I scratched her throat tenderly and, my head close to hers, kept whispering, "Hush, Bell—hush—hush."

Hidden in thick bulrushes and willows, by a small lake, we watched an old peasant unhitch his shabby horse from a wagon, wipe her off with a handful of straw and rub her neck. He was in his back yard, shut in on two sides by a wooden fence, his hut on the third, and his barn on the fourth.

"He likes her—he'll be good to ours," whispered Alec, watching the peasant.

I nodded, and pressed my cheek to Bell's hard jawbone. I heard the crunching of her teeth and felt the warmth of her skin.

It was getting dark. The peasant mumbled something to his horse. She stepped from the shafts, shook her head, and like a clumsy puppy galloped two or three steps, probably for joy at getting home, then turned around and followed her master like a shadow, waiting for him to open the barn or give her food. The peasant untied a bucket from the axle of the wagon and started toward the lake, the horse following.

"Be careful!" I warned, touching Alec's sleeve. He stood tense with silence.

The peasant was passing not more than fifty yards away when his horse suddenly stopped and pricked up her ears. I could see both our horses stiffen and move theirs. A long few seconds passed.

"Come on, you lazy slut!" the peasant shouted.

She moved to the edge of the water, keeping her head with quivering nostrils turned in our direction. She had a sense of horses. Then she lowered her head and began to drink with long slow gulps, making a loud sipping sound now and then.

Alec's lips were near my ear: "Just like Doctor Kraj eating his soup."

"Shut up, you fool." I came near giggling.

Meanwhile, the peasant had gone out on to a board which extended into the lake, used probably for washing clothes. He dipped up a pail of water and drank from the bucket with the same slow gulps as his horse. Then he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, poured out the water left in the bucket, and drew another pailful before starting back. The horse was still drinking.

When the man reached the opening in the rail fence, he whistled. Slowly, the horse followed him, still looking in our direction. Suddenly she stopped and neighed shrilly.

"Hold them, Alec—for Christ's sake!"

We gripped the caps on our horses' nostrils and tightened the reins under their chins. They moved their ears as if cutting the air with scissors—but they did not answer.

Again the peasant's horse neighed—this time she was short and sharp, as if saying, "I don't care!" and proceeded into the enclosure.

Alec and I sighed with relief.

We waited for nightfall. We knew at last that we must

get along without the horses. For two days now we had had to lead them through the underbrush and along the edge of the woods. When we were tired, we had mounted them, but even then we had to move at a slow walk. A trotting horse can be heard a long way off on a still night. In two days we had made about twenty miles in a straight line—and had traveled forty or fifty to do it. Hiding and moving under the cover of the forests, we had watched the activities of the Reds. Another day's journey would bring us to a small town which had a railroad station, and we dared not risk taking the horses with us. They still showed good care and would arouse suspicion, they were clearly officers' horses.

We had made up our minds to leave them in the middle of the night in some peasant's barn, and then hurry on afoot. So we had spent the whole day observing this particular house on the bank of the lake, and had decided that the peasant was a lonely man, had no dog, and was kind to his shabby mare. We would make him a present of two good horses—a fortune to him. We hoped that he would not try to trace us and would not talk much about it—at least, for a while—as long as it would take us to reach the railroad and start on our way to Moscow.

It was dark now. We saw the red glow of the stove through a window of the little house. In the hamlet a quarter of a mile away, a dog barked.

We fed the horses the rest of the oats, then sat on the ground and finished the remnants of bacon and hard dry bread we had brought with us. All four of us chewed in silence for a while.

"They were good horses to us," Alec observed.

"Good horses," I said.

Then I thought, "What will become of them? They won't be shot anyhow . . . that's something."

I forgot that we ourselves might be shot at any moment. I could only realize that I must part with my close friend—who never betrayed me—who always carried her burden willingly—who shared the warmth of her own blood with me—who could die silently and bear pain stoically only because the Man demanded it. And when that Man became insane with blood thirst, she would follow him and participate in his delirium. How could I repay such loyalty? What could I give her? What could I say to her? Bell was thankful when I rubbed her back—when I gave her a lump of sugar or a handful of oats—when I whispered tenderly into her ear, "You lousy bitch—you dear clever whore. . . . Bell—are you my Bell?" She would understand my whisper, the clumsy soldier's rough words, and try to catch my sleeve with her pink lips. Seeing me for the first time each morning, she neighed longingly, and against all her natural animal instincts, did not neigh when my dirty cap was rammed over her nostrils. Sensitive as a woman, she always knew my mood, and worried or played accordingly.

How would she feel to-morrow? If Bell could speak, she might argue, "I was good enough to carry you among bullets and shells—why can't I carry you now? What kind of danger is this? I'm not afraid—let me go with you."

What could I tell her? How could I explain? In Man's way, I had taken from her all I needed and now, when there was no need of her any more, I was leaving her behind. If I could only explain it to her.

"I think it's time now," Alec's voice broke in and ended the futile brooding.

It was pitch dark. The window of the house had lost its burning redness, and the house and barn were but two faint silhouettes.

"All right. . . . Shall we throw the saddles away?"

"Leave them here in the bushes."

"Let's go. I'll go first—Alec, you stay here. If everything is all right, I'll come back to the gate and lead your horse in. No use both going into the barn."

"All right."

I took hold of Bell close to the bit and started carefully. She followed with lowered head. I reached the gate, lifted the rail and put it on the ground. Bell carefully stepped over it. We crossed the yard.

The door of the barn was part way open. I entered the warm blackness. The peasant's mare was munching hay. As I led Bell toward her, she sniffed, and then neighed tenderly and almost voicelessly, as if saying:

"Come in and welcome. I knew you dumb-bells were near by—you couldn't fool me!"

Bell stood quietly. I tied her to the other horse's halter, so she wouldn't move away.

In the darkness, I walked as fast as I could back across the yard. Alec was waiting at the gate with his horse.

"How is it?"

"All right. . . . Come on."

I brought the second horse into the barn and started to tie Alec's horse to Bell's halter.

And then suddenly I felt like a helpless, abandoned little boy going through punishment. I leaned my face against Bell's, threw my arm about her neck, kissed her cheek, and cried and cried, unable to stop. Tears, running down my face, wet Bell's skin. I sniffed and cried again, silently, with mouth open and eyes closed, swallowing my own tears as fast as they came until my mouth was salty and dry.

Alec pulled my sleeve. "Come on, father—they'll be all right. The barn is full of hay."

He found my hand and took it in his, which was cold and wet. We walked all that night without saying a word to each other.

XXX

A NIGHT'S LODGING

IN SUCH a torrential rain we could not go on. For twenty-four hours we had not slept, walking all night after leaving our horses. Early in the morning it had started to rain, and we had hidden under a hay-stack throughout the next day. The water creeping up around us had kept us from sleeping. Now it was night again with another march ahead of us. But we had gone the limit, we had to have a dry place under any kind of roof and warm food inside us.

We were near a much traveled highway. We decided to risk appearing at some unimportant village in which we could buy food and shelter. We had money.

To keep the water from pouring down inside our collars, we threw our overcoats over our heads. Then we walked across the field and on to the highway.

It was about eight o'clock. Occasionally we met a man walking and now and then a wagon passed us. Nobody paid any attention to us. At first, on hearing a wagon, we would crouch at the side of the road and hold ourselves rigid until the wagon had passed on. But after a while, we grew bolder and kept on dragging ourselves through the mud as if we knew our destination and were sure that the end of the march was in view.

The few people we met were in a hurry. Everybody wanted to escape that steady downpour and get to some place where he could dry himself before a warm fire. No one showed the slightest wish to stop us or to talk, no one proposed giving us a lift, or asked any questions.

After a two-hour march, we came to a village. On the outskirts we passed a melancholy cemetery, a military one, judging from the uniformity of the crosses. We went on along the road straight through the village to make sure that no troops were stationed there.

Forty houses lined both sides of the road. They were dark and quiet, all but two or three houses which still showed a dim light behind the windows. A lonely lantern swung on a chain over the door of a large tea house in the middle. Pierced by endless strings of rain, the yellow aura of light clung to the lantern and swayed with it.

We found nothing suspicious, so we started back.

Alec said, "I'll try the tea house and you try one of those houses showing a light. Let's not stay together. If they catch one of us, the other will still have a chance."

"In that case, don't stick your nose into the tea house. The first place they'd look for us would be a tea house."

We stopped in front of it.

"Well, I'll be careful. Where'll we meet to-morrow?"

"About half an hour's walk the other side of the village. Good night, Alec."

"Good night, father."

I plowed through the mud while Alec waited for me to disappear before entering the tea house.

I soon found myself back again near the cemetery on the outskirts. A lonely little house with drawn shutters showed a glimmer of light inside. It was the last house on the road, withdrawn from its neighbors. I considered. There was the cemetery close by in which one might hide and make a get-away. This was the house for me.

I knocked briskly. Immediately I heard a chair or a table being moved inside—then silence. Suddenly I was shaking.

From behind the door which did not open, I heard a piercing whisper that seemed close to my ear:

"Go around to the back door—to the back door—for God's mother's sake, go around!"

It was a woman's voice—convincing, and with the power of sharp command, but with a fierce pleading.

I walked around the house. The white crosses on my right flickered with drops of rain as I passed whenever the light through the shutters struck them.

I rounded the corner. There was a small extension on the house, almost a shack. The door was half open and a faint light glowed from within. Suddenly the light went out—it was pitch dark. I stopped.

The same voice sounded again. "Come in—come in, my golden one—my dear one. I shut off the oven—the light might attract them."

I moved a step. Something white was standing in the doorway. I could hardly make out the outstretched hands. I moved closer. Two hands were touching me and running all over me until they stopped on my face.

"I just wanted to ask . . ." I started taking the woman's hands away from my face—but she did not give me a chance to finish.

"Don't talk, my angel—don't talk, my martyr, dear. Oh, how I have waited for you——"

Her arms were around my neck now. They removed my dripping overcoat and threw it on the floor. Her body, trembling suddenly, clung to me as if the woman wanted to dissolve in me.

"Say," I said quickly, "I'm not the one you think I am."

Her face was close to mine. She had a clean young warm breath.

"I know you have to hide, dearest—I know if they find you they will take you away from me again. I know—but I'll hide you. Oh, my sunny light, my joy—my beloved one——"

She began tenderly and gently to kiss my face, my lips, my eyes. My arms went around her—she had nothing on but a homespun linen shirt. I tried again to talk. But she was set in her notion. I could not make her listen.

She sobbed quietly. "I'm hungry for you, my falcon—oh, how I'm hungry! Love me—love me, dearest."

I did not know what to make of it. I said, "Let me shut the door."

"I'll do it!"

She sprang away from me swiftly.

"I'll lock it—I'll bar it—they won't come in."

I heard the key turn, the bolt pushed. Then she came back to me, took me by the hand and led me into the room. It was fairly large, with a Russian oven in the center and benches along the wall. The ikons glittered in the corner. There was a fire in the oven, but it was shut off with a piece of sheet-iron, and almost no light escaped. Even so, it was a bit lighter than it had been outside, and I could see a little of the woman's face.

It was oval and pale, with down-drooping eyelids which never were raised. Her black hair was wound in two braids around her head—her mouth was a painful outline, its corners curving down and the lower lip slightly protruding. Her shirt hung loose and one strong round breast was naked.

She spoke now feverishly, not once lifting her eyes. "Undress here—your clothes are dripping wet—let me take your boots off—my sufferer—I love you—I love you——"

Once more I tried to speak—in vain. She trembled and kissed me and begged me not to talk—not to be afraid—to rest assured that I was safe—that nobody, nobody would take me away from her now.

It was clear the woman took me for some one else, but for the life of me I couldn't get that into her head. I

couldn't even make her look at me, though I knew she wasn't blind; she moved around with freedom. She put my clothes and boots behind the oven to dry.

She brought me a warm wet towel and helped me wash my body. Then she gave me a clean shirt smelling of mint, she gave me white under-drawers. She herself wiped my face and combed my hair with her hands. She must have seen my face—there was no doubt of that.

I felt warm and dry, and the clean coarse shirt rubbed my shoulders and back gently. Suddenly I was conscious of my heart, thumping steadily and with a force beyond my control. Each beat made me feel two hard breasts. I took the woman in my arms and kissed her neck. She sighed like a wounded doe. She led me to her bed, which was on the top of the oven. It was warm and smelled of fresh hay. The woman buried my head in her bosom, and started to shake violently, as if an electric current were shooting through her with immeasurable speed.

I do not know how long I slept. I awoke with a sudden start. Loud voices sounded outside. Somebody was knocking on the door at the front of the house. The woman was sitting up beside me, ready to jump down. She whispered sharply into my ear: "Step down behind the oven."

I thought, "This is the end . . . where did I put my gun . . . on the oven."

I turned and picked it up. The woman was tiptoeing to the front door. I squeezed myself between the hot plaster wall of the oven and the wall of the house. I could barely see the woman, all naked, standing at the door, her body bending forward, tense.

The voices outside were lower now. I heard footsteps of at least four people splashing through water, going around the house. They paused at the window nearest me. I listened.

A low, kind, elderly voice was saying, "I assure you, Comrade, there is nobody in her house. She is demented, she wouldn't let anybody in. Ever since they took her husband away—it was right after the wedding—they brought him back dead three days later with his face smashed into a pulp—since then, she's been—sort of peacefully crazy. All she does is tell everybody that he'll come back one of these days. But if you argue with her or scare her, she goes into convulsions and howls for hours and tries to kill herself. It's better to let her alone."

Another voice said bruskly, "On your own responsibility, Elder. Put somebody to watch that house and look through it in the morning."

The kind voice spoke again, "How many of them do you think escaped?"

"The whole band of damned Poles! We caught some of them. I traced two who left their horses in a barn in Cholopy village and went ahead on foot. If it hadn't been for the rain, I'd have caught them. Well, maybe I'll catch them yet. Watch this house, Elder."

"I will. But I'm sure there is nobody there but the woman. They must have passed the village."

"Thank God," I thought, "Alec is not caught."

The steps in the water began to slap again and moved away. When all was quiet once more, the woman ran swiftly back to me.

"Come," she said.

I followed her. A hollow resignation gripped my mind.

I climbed back to bed. She crawled next to me. "They won't take you away any more, my sweet one," she said. Her hands moved tenderly along my body as if making sure that I was still there. Gently she caressed my lips with her cheek. I felt her whole being close to me—and I knew now that she was mad.

I got up before dawn. The woman slept peacefully on her palm, eyes closed. I covered her with the blanket, went into the shack, dressed quickly and noiselessly, took my gun and slipped out of the shack.

It was still dark. I sneaked between the crosses in the cemetery into the fields beyond, and around the village, back on to the road again.

I marched along the edge of the road—the rain was over, and in the east, the sky was red. The day would be bright and warm.

Suddenly I heard a voice: "Father."

It was Alec, sitting in the gutter. He smiled happily and swung into my step. We marched together.

"Where did you sleep?" I asked.

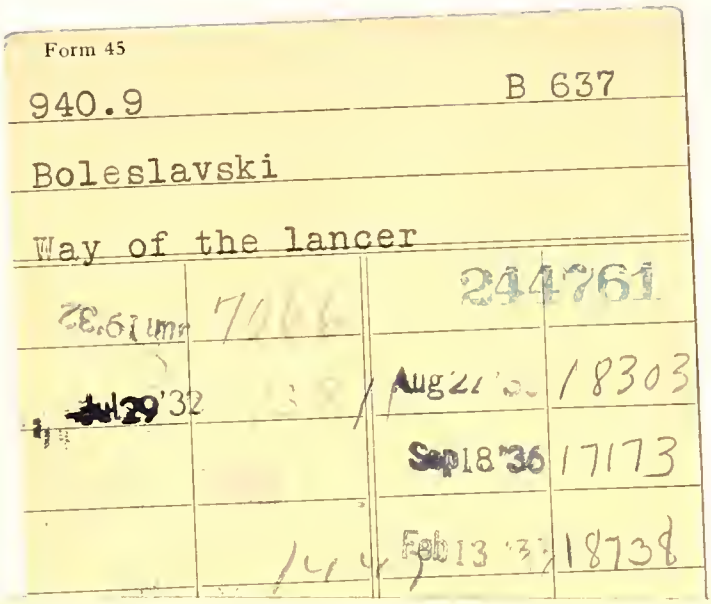
"In the pig house. They didn't find me," he laughed. "Where did you sleep?"

"In the mad-house—they didn't find me, either."

The sun popped out from behind rolling fields. We were marching fast, swinging our hands as if we wanted to catch and fight the red rising sun.

In the evening we boarded a train with a mob of soldiers, and in five days reached Moscow.

THE END



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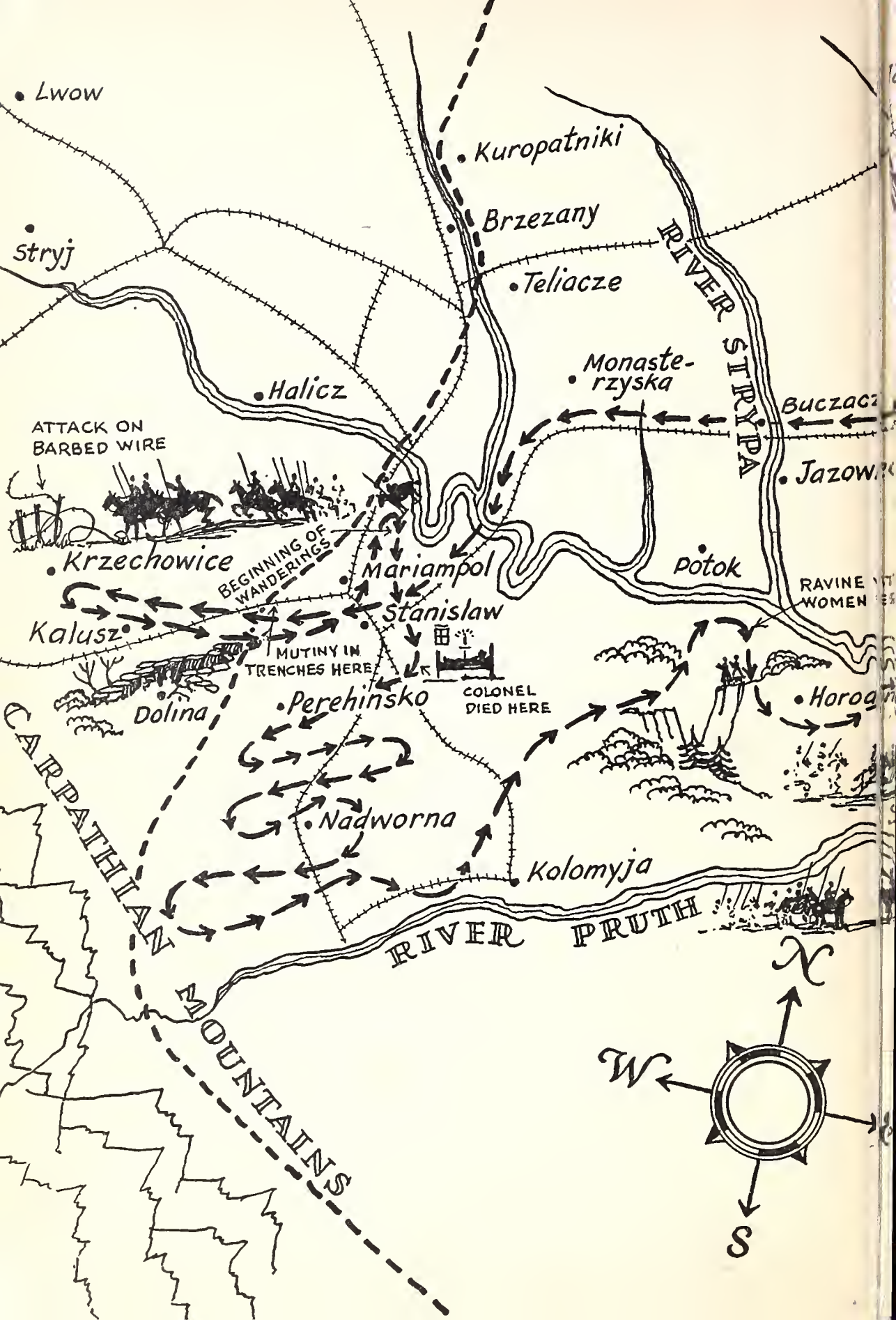
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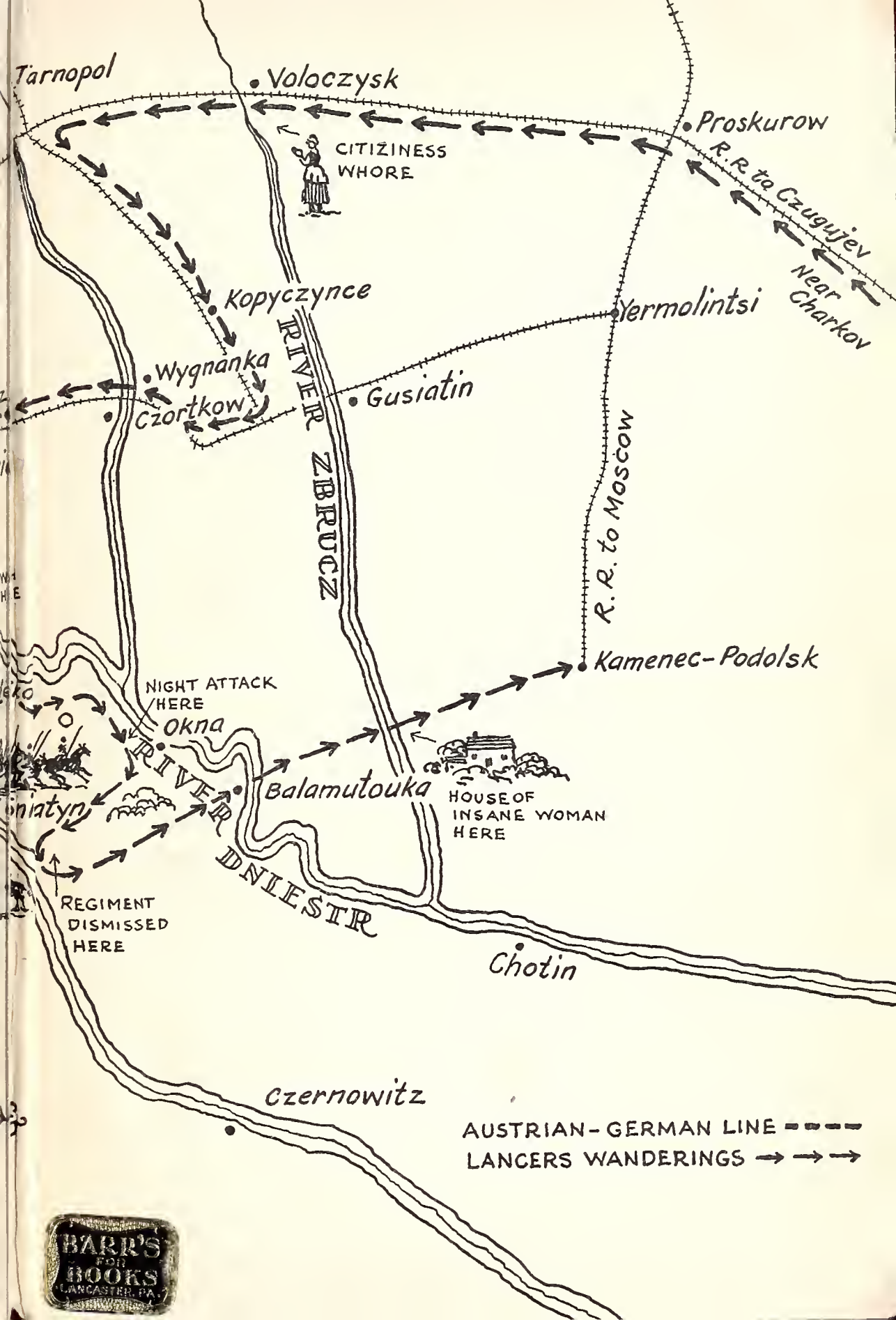

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